

Chapter One: Harry Potter and the...

When JK Rowling first came to my husband eleven years ago with her idea, I was skeptical. It wasn't the first time someone had talked to Harry about what happened so many years ago, and it wouldn't be the first time a writer had called upon him to double-check a fact for a textbook. This was different. This woman, this Joanne Rowling, wanted to have extensive interviews over a series of months, picking his brain for every little detail, every little morsel of information, and create the biography of the Boy-Who-Lived. She stated that the public had a thirst to know and it would sell, she claimed, faster than any book in the history of publications.

As we sat across from the woman, Harry said very little. I tended to the tiny boy that had come into the world less than three months prior. Little Albus cooed in my arms. He was such a beautiful creature. His eyes were emerald, just like Harry's, just like the mother Harry had inherited them from. And already in his first couple months of life, I could tell he was going to have a personality similar to Harry. After all, they were both infatuated with the same witch, thank you very much.

I glanced at Ms. Rowling. She was a charming woman. She hadn't presented the idea as a get-rich-quick scheme or disrespected the past events, and she seemed genuinely convinced that people needed to know about Harry's life. I admired her patience. It was astounding that she sat there so long, waiting for Harry's response to her offer.

I took Harry's hesitation as an opportunity to steal a glance at his face. He had that look in his eyes, in which the weight of the world was on his shoulders, a look that I had not seen in many years. I could tell he might be considering it, but disliked the idea of such attention as the book would receive. The man was always hesitant to talk about the events, because they were intertwined with so much loss that he felt was his fault... Cedric... Sirius... Dumbledore... *Fred*.

I don't want you to think we tiptoe around the subject. Far from it. For Merlin's sake, we literally are the most talked-about family in the Wizarding world. It would be impossible to avoid the past like that. And we have decided as parents that we don't want anyone but us

telling our children about what happened. We make sure that James, Albus, and eventually Lily know what their parents had to go through to find peace.

This was different, and I knew those things were racing through his mind faster than a speeding broomstick. Talking to admirers was unavoidable, but they asked the easy questions. Talking to me was comforting since I asked the intimate questions. Talking to his children was a necessity, but they only asked innocent questions. Talking to an author would be difficult because she would be asking the questions that hurt, that dug up the pain. *Oh yes, this was different.*

Harry didn't decide then. He asked Joanne if she could bear to wait a few days before he answered, which she happily obliged. He spent the next few days in a different world. When James wanted to ride with his father on a broom, Harry, who is usually very excited that his first son was taking an interest in Quidditch, declined. When I offered him a chocolate frog, he half-smiled and mumbled that he wasn't hungry.

I wasn't offended that he kept to himself, because I know that it can only last a day or so before he seeks my counsel. He has always been like that. He needs to gather his thoughts before approaching someone with a decision like this.

"Ginny," he said quietly two days after Joanne left, as I placed Albus in his cot. I kissed the sleeping angel on the forehead and turned around to face my husband. He reached for my hand gently and led me to sit on the bed beside him.

"Been thinking, have we?" I asked him.

He nodded, looking down at my hand entwined with his. "Do you... do you think I should...?"

I had known the question was coming, and I had thought about it just as much as Harry had, between giving the boys their baths and tidying up the house. I reached up and parted his hair, revealing a lightning-bolt shaped scar that haunted him when he was younger. "When is the last time this hurt you?"

Harry looked inquisitively at me, and although not quite sure of my intentions, decided to play along. "Over eight years ago... In the battle for Hogwarts..."

I traced the mark with my index finger slowly. "People know what this is. They see this scar and they're reminded of all the good things you've done, and what you had to go through to bring peace to us."

My hand took a different course and I placed it over his heart. I could feel the muscle beating rapidly. Strange that I have this effect on him even after all these years. Pressing lightly against his chest, I said, "But they don't know what this is."

He smiled at me, and this time, my heart raced. Strange that he still has that effect on me after all these years, too. "And Harry, only you can decide if it's important for others to know what was in your heart during those years. I will support you either way."

"But the attention it will bring me..."

I laughed. "Harry, has a day gone by that someone didn't recognize you immediately? How many times have complete strangers thanked you?"

He shook his head, and I could tell that his mind was beginning to grasp what I was saying. "I don't want people to think I am bragging, because..."

"You're not," I finished for him.

"Exactly," Harry said. "I didn't do those things to be the best, or to be famous, or to... to get the girl..." His eyes twinkled as he mentioned me indirectly. "I did what I had to do to protect the people I love, so nobody would have to suffer under the hand of Voldemort again..." Eight years later and the man still can't keep a tear from forming in the corner of his eyes. "I did what anybody would have done."

So modest, my husband. Not just anybody would have stepped up to do what he did. I gave him the look that he's so familiar with, the look he understands as *we've already been through this part of the conversation and my opinion has not changed*. Instead of repeating

myself, I wiped the tear from his cheek, and said, "Then that's what they need to hear."

He was silent, and I knew he had reached his decision, and as hard as it was going to be, he was going to share his story. I looked admiringly at him, trying to decide whether it was his eyes or his smile that I first was enamored with. I placed a hand on his cheek ever so delicately and leaned in to kiss him. I swear that I still get the same feeling from kissing him like I did when we kissed for all of the Gryffindor common room to see.

He pushed me back carefully, and asked in a whisper, "Are the kids asleep?" I glanced over at Albus and nodded. "Good," he replied. "I want to show you just how much I love you."

He invited Joanne back the following day. She was ecstatic to hear that Harry had agreed. They immediately skimmed over his life for a few hours right there in the kitchen. I fed them, refilled their drinks, even joined in multiple times to add my two sickles. It was a scene that happened three times a week for a year.

I originally was expecting one large book, but it took me by complete surprise that she was able to spit out seven novels, the last four exceeding 600 pages each. The public latched on to the stories like they were sweets, and I would say that every family in our world had a copy of the series. Even Harry seemed pleased, though he tried his best not to show it.

Closing the final book, I wiped tears away from my reddened eyes. Despite the fact that I had gone through everything that was in the books, I still cried. Harry stroked my hair and smiled. He had been waiting for me to finish for days now and was excited that he finally had the chance to ask how I felt about them. "Marvelous," I said, in a soft reflective voice. "Were you happy with the outcome?"

Harry shrugged slightly, and I gave him a curious look. "Well," he started. "Overall, she did an amazing job, but I thought she could have included more..."

"More what?"

Sheepishly, he looked at me. "You."

I rolled my eyes. "Oh Harry, you're sweet, but they wanted to hear about you and your victory. I am happy with the attention I received... and the ending that I alone have." I grabbed his collar and kissed him hard.

A soft moan escaped his mouth. "Maybe..." he mumbled. "Maybe one day, you can write about us. You know, fill in the missing blanks. Our love story. The girls will just eat it up..." And I kissed him harder, making him forget about his proposal, at least for the time being.

When we thought the surprises were done, JK hit us with another one. Less than four months after the series release, she had received permission from the Ministry to attempt a crossover of worlds. She was allowed to take the books to the Muggle world and market them as children's fantasy. To be honest, I couldn't help but laugh at this. The Muggles weren't going to understand these books, and what the people don't understand, they couldn't care less about.

Despite my skepticism, JK Rowling was able to publish the first book in 1997, followed by the remaining six at different times throughout the next ten years. And dear Merlin, was I wrong! The Muggles couldn't get enough of our world. According to JK Rowling, she has currently sold 325 million copies combined. For awhile I would swear that she was using magic to make the books more appealing to people, but Harry reminded me that this would be illegal. "Inappropriate spell usage against Muggles," he called it.

We sat with Ms. Rowling no more than a few weeks after the release of the final book in our home. Lily was in the next room, most likely sulking that both her brothers were now at Hogwarts.

Joanne looked exhausted. "This has been such a difficult ten years for me," she said to Harry and me. "I had these books done for a decade, and I couldn't let them know what happened. You might find this surprising, but those Muggles are relentless."

Harry nodded. He must have been thinking of his time with the Dursleys. "What are you going to do now, Joanne? Want some more interviews?" he playfully said.

Joanne chuckled. "I told the Muggles I was working on two different stories. I hope they're not expecting anything as good as what we gave them."

"I'm sure it will be grand," I told her. "You're a fantastic writer."

She looked at me approvingly. "So Harry tells me you want to write a companion piece to the novels."

"Did he now?" I asked, looking towards Harry with amusement. I'd have to make sure he gets thoroughly punished for his actions.

"I'm only taking the mickey out of you," Joanne replied. She bit her lip in thought, then proceeded to say, "Although I think it's a brilliant idea. I didn't put nearly as much of you in the story as I would have liked," and I blushed only slightly as she continued, "I hope you understand why I had to leave things out."

"I do," I replied, "but I can't possibly..."

"Nonsense," she retorted. "I was privileged to read a few of the letters you sent to Harry over the years. Quite beautiful, if I may be so bold. The world would be a better place if you let them know how the Chosen One became *your* chosen one."

I was a bit embarrassed to hear she had read my letters. I hoped she wasn't referring to the letters I sent him back in my second season of playing with the Holyhead Harpies while he was away on Auror business. We were less than two years married and I hadn't seen him for three weeks. The letters aren't exactly fit for young readers, if you understand what I mean. But... I felt honored that such an accomplished writer would pay me that kind of compliment.

The idea was sounding better and better. I directed my gaze towards Harry, who was sipping a butterbeer. Grinning, I said, "Maybe you're right. I bet the girls would go crazy when I tell them about the first time we sha..."

I was unable to finish the sentence. Harry had choked on his beverage and had spit the liquid all over himself. I laughed when his face went as crimson as my hair. Of course, I would never reveal

those intimate details, but Harry didn't need to know that. In fact, I rather enjoyed watching MY Chosen One make a fool of himself in front of arguably the best author in both the Wizarding and Muggle worlds.

Oh yes, this might actually be fun.

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Author Notes:

*When I combined the Harry Potter universe with the real-life publication of the books, I ran into a problem with the timeline (which almost caused me to not post this story at all). I made a hard decision and decided to ignore what is obviously known about the series. I need **you** as a fan to also ignore the timeline in order to make this chapter work. By moving all the events back ten years, I believe that it doesn't affect this story or the original cannon in any way. The characters, the events, the emotions, and the personalities are still the same. (The majority of this story doesn't require you to ignore the timeline. Most of the chapters flow as if nothing had been changed.)*

To clear things up, here is the new time:

1970: Harry born
1988: Voldemort's defeat in Deathly Hallows
1996: JK Rowling comes to Harry Potter
1997: ALL the books are released in the Wizarding World
...: Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone released in the Muggle World
2007: Deathly Hallows released in the Muggle World
...: Ginny starts writing this book (my story) right after the scene in the epilogue

The second issue that needs to be addressed is the epilogue. Does it still happen in my story, because it doesn't make sense with the

timeline? YES, it still happens, but we're going to have to say it was added later or just wasn't wanted included in the publication.

If you are willing to shred those tiny bits of canon, then I am ready to take you on a ride that I am extremely proud of.

P.S. I have added a F.A.Q. section at the end. If you have a question, it might be able to be answered there (although I have NO problem addressing your question directly). Just be warned, some of the question could reveal spoilers for other.

Chapter Two: I am Ginevra Molly Weasley

I grew up, like every Wizarding child, hearing the infamous story of the Boy-Who-Lived. Of course, there was wide speculation about the stories, because no one who was present had lived to tell the tale, save one boy, and nobody seemed to know where he was for ten years. Before we would go to sleep, Mum would let me hypothesize on just what happened at Godric's Hollow that fateful night.

"I think that Harry Potter held up a mirror," I said when I was seven, laughing hysterically. "And You-Know-Who was so scared of seeing himself that he died!"

Mum would smile fondly at me. I never knew until I started Hogwarts that my parents knew James and Lily Potter. It was also a mystery to me that the Potters' deaths were so tragic to the Wizarding world. I'd like to think that if I knew, I wouldn't have joked as I did.

I lived in a black and white world, where good triumphed over evil as it was supposed to, and where people were either nice or mean. I never imagined there were gray areas until I found out about Snape's loyalty many years later. It was hard for me to believe that such a foul man could be so brave and righteous. I was happy and content knowing that a "great good wizard beat the mean-mean You-Know-Who."

Maybe this was normal for witches my age, but I developed quite an attachment towards Harry before I even knew him. And I don't mean when I first met him, but I mean through the bedtime stories. Maybe it was the fact that I was just born when Lord Voldemort tried to kill him and he was only supposed to be a year older than me. He was MY age, more or less, and he was able to do such extraordinary things when I couldn't even control my magic when I got angry. What was there not to admire? If I had to guess, I'd say it was the *ideal* of Harry that motivated my childish attraction.

I knew, without a shadow of a doubt, when I listened to the stories, that I was going to be very important to Harry Potter. In my younger years, I even told Mum this. "I'm gonna be his best friend someday," I said matter-of-factly. She never scolded me for coming up with such wild fantasies. She didn't even call me cute for thinking such things. I

don't know if she believed me, but she certainly never mocked me for it. She would smile warmly and tell me that she hoped I was right.

Mum was always like that with me. She humored me even if what I said made little sense. I think it had a lot to do with me being her only daughter. After all, I am the first female Weasley born after seven generations of men. I bet it came as a real shocker when little me popped out. I suspect the healers barely even looked before they announced I was a boy. I can see Mum smacking and yelling at them, calling them blind for not seeing that I was a beautiful baby girl.

There I was then, a little girl in the world of men. My hair was the same fiery red that my family was known for. My freckles were thrown on my face in every which way. My brown eyes, I must say, were frosted with determination. That's because since the time I could walk, I was always trying to prove myself to my older brothers. I would follow Bill around during the holidays. I tried hard to keep my cool when Charlie would find some dangerous creature. I hated to be left out of the twin's practical jokes. And Ron was always my best friend. The only brother I never tried to emulate was Percy.

With that many brothers, I was a tough little girl. And I was never much of a crier, despite the fact that the first time I appear in JK's adaptation, I was crying. In my defense, that had not been a very good day for me. Someone had broken my trainer wand and wouldn't confess, and my last brother was starting his first year at Hogwarts, leaving me without a buddy for months.

That's when we saw him. Or rather, he saw us. Of course, I had no idea who he was. His raven-colored hair was messy, so it hid that distinguishing scar. His glasses were taped in the middle, taking away a bit of his legendary nobility. And he looked completely and hopelessly lost. And even with this mystery boy's goofy-looking demeanor, my ten-year-old heart skipped a beat when he looked at me for the first time. I didn't know what the feeling was supposed to mean. No boy had ever had that kind of influence on me.

When the twins informed us of who he was, I begged Mum to let me on the train to see him. She wouldn't let me and when the train pulled away, I cried and I laughed, but mostly cried.

Mum took me by the hand and led me away from Platform 9 ¾. She looked at me, grinned, and asked me if I was okay. Sniffling, I responded with a half-hearted nod. "You will see him again," she said simply, and I knew that she didn't mean just Ron. She winked at me, as if to remind me of what I always used to say when I was younger.

"Do you really think so?" I asked.

"I suppose we'll see," she replied. Her brown eyes sparkled. "Can I let you in on a secret?" she asked, taking out a hanky and wiping the dampness from my cheeks. I nodded. "Dumbledore told me to keep a look out for him today. He thought he might be coming alone."

"Did you know it was him?"

Mum shook her head. "I was trying to keep Fred and George under control—"

"And trying to ignore Percy's reminders that he was a Prefect?" I asked.

Mum gave me the look and continued. "I didn't link the two together. Poor boy, all alone on a day like this. It's a good thing he didn't get lost."

I was worried immediately about Harry. What if he would be as lost at Hogwarts as he was here at the train station? What if Ron ditched him and left Harry friendless?

Mum sensed my concern, and said, "Don't you worry about that boy. Do you think your brothers would just forget about him? And I'm sure Dumbledore won't let him out of his sight this year."

I felt better.

I came home that day a different girl. When I left earlier that morning, I was a child concerned with dolls, and stuffed animals, and toy wands. Returning home, I had one thing on my mind, or rather, one person, but even I didn't understand the implications of where my thoughts were heading.

I eagerly awaited the first letter from my brothers, but unfortunately it was Percy's which came earliest. Of course it was! It came two days after they arrived at school, and the letter was as boring as a class with Professor Binns, although I was delighted to hear that Ron had been Sorted into Gryffindor. When I read that Harry had as well, I never squealed so loud.

The next two letters were from Fred and George, the first one explaining their practical jokes on Filch, Snape, and Percy, and also their distress about not finding a Seeker for the Gryffindor Quidditch team. They regretted not being able to send me the toilet seat they had promised since Filch caught them trying to acquire one, which sent Mum into a rampage. I convinced her that they were only joking. The second one was sent no less than a week later, explaining proudly that they had found a new Seeker.... HARRY!

I had always loved to fly and fancied myself a natural, but it was at that moment that I vowed to be a Quidditch player for my school house.

Halloween came faster than I expected. It was my first sad Halloween. My brothers and I always had a jack-o-lantern carving contest, and Dad would pick the winner when he came home from work. The victor would be allowed something new the next time we went to Diagon Alley. In our house and our financial situation, that was a big deal. It was just Ron and me for the last two years. Ron won once, and I won once, and I really wanted to prove that I was better. This year, I was all alone.

Mum told me to stop sulking and make the best of the situation. When she handed me a pumpkin and told me that I would win, I rolled my eyes, but proceeded to carve a face into my big orange canvas. When I finished, it resembled a cute boy with glasses that I couldn't quite recognize. Mum didn't stop grinning at me the whole night.

The next morning, we received an owl informing us of Hogwarts Halloween festivities. Apparently, someone let a mountain troll in and almost killed Ron, Harry, and Hermione. Three first years... MY brother and his friends... had defeated the creature. I couldn't have

been prouder, but Mum was livid. "That boy is going to get himself killed! I cannot believe he thought he could take on a *troll*!"

"But, Mum," I protested, "he did take on a troll. And he won."

Mum was still fuming, but I sensed a bit of pride in her eyes after I said that. She didn't like to say it, but Ron always worried her more than my other brothers did. He had always been the least confident of her sons and usually the most accident-prone. I had seen what my brother could do if he's not thinking about it and I suspected the troll-hunting was a similar situation.

Fred and George kept me up-to-date on the first Quidditch match. They sang Harry's praises almost as much as I would throughout the years, and said that he was a natural, born to ride a broom, and won the match by the skin of his teeth. That last bit confused me until I found out later that he caught the Snitch by almost *swallowing it*!

Christmas was approaching fast. In early December, Mum and I traveled to Diagon Alley to pick out the wool to make her famous Weasley jumpers. In Madam Malkin's, Mum casually said that Harry wasn't expecting any gifts this year. My eyes lit up and exclaimed, "Can we make him a jumper, Mum? Please...." In hindsight, I fully think that she intended to do so anyhow, but wanted it to be my idea.

"I think that's a grand idea," Mum replied. "In fact," she continued, "do you want to pick out the material?"

My face flushed. What kind of material do you get a boy who saved the Wizarding world from a madman? Who defeated a mountain troll? Who is the best Seeker the world has seen... ever? Okay, so I exaggerate... he was only the best Seeker until I stepped up... hehe... anyway, I carefully examined all the material that Madam Malkin had available and, after much inner turmoil, picked out this beautiful emerald green wool that felt amazing. I handed it to Mum.

She took it and examined the price tag. She looked defeated. "Ginny, this is a little bit too expensive for us."

"Oh Mum, please!" I begged. How was I supposed to convince her that there could be no other material? This was the perfect kind, as if

it had been waiting here for me to choose! “Look at the color, Mum. Isn’t it the best?”

“Ginny, pick something less...”

“It matches his eyes!” I said quickly, and then feeling slightly embarrassed to admit I had noticed such a thing, I reached for the material to put back, but Mum held onto it. A softness had returned to her face. I pulled slightly harder, but she wouldn’t let go.

“Does it mean that much to you?” she asked, and I nodded. She patted the material in her hands and said, “I do still owe you something for the pumpkin carving contest.” I smiled.

We spent that Christmas with Charlie in Romania, but without Ron and the twins, I didn’t feel as excited as I should have been. Charlie was working most of the time but did manage to cure my Yuletide blues once December 25th rolled around.

Mum and I stopped getting as many letters after Christmas passed. Percy was working hard on his OWLs. Fred and George were practicing hard for Quidditch and probably working hard on some elaborate practical joke. Percy did send one letter, saying, “Ron and his little friends do seem a bit pre-occupied.”

Nobody understood what this “pre-occupied” meant until we found out what had happened. Near the end of the term, the Golden Trio (as all the textbooks now call them) had single-handedly stopped Professor Quirrell and Lord Voldemort from stealing the Sorcerer’s Stone and bringing the Dark Lord back to power. My parents couldn’t have been prouder of Ron.

And of course, this gave me all the more reason to admire Harry Potter. Waiting with Mum and Dad at the train station, I listed all the reasons Harry was amazing. His eyes... defeating Mountain Trolls... talented Seeker... taking on Voldemort twice and winning...

Butterflies danced in my stomach as I scanned the crowd, half-expecting his eyes to light up and reveal his location. My anxious 10-year-old mind could hardly contain the anticipation. I finally spotted a sea of red hair, and in the middle was him...

"There he is, Mum, there he is, look!" I squealed. I pointed towards him. "Harry Potter! Look, Mum! I can see..."

"Be quiet, Ginny, and it's rude to point," Mum snapped at me, and I shut up, though I could hardly contain my glee. The boys approached us. "Busy year?" Mum asked Harry.

"Very," Harry said. "Thanks for the fudge and the jumper, Mrs. Weasley."

"Oh," she said, giving my hand a squeeze. "It was nothing, dear." When Harry's attention turned towards his Uncle, Mum glanced at me and grinned. "He liked the jumper, Ginny," she whispered to me, and I shuddered with excitement. "But stop treating him like a muggle clown. You'll never win his heart by gawking and pointing."

I stifled a gasp. "But... I don't want..." I stumbled over my words, trying to think up an excuse. I was embarrassed. How dare Mum accuse me of such things! Boys were the last thing on my mind. Even if I didn't recognize my growing crush, my mother did, and the look in her eyes told me she was approving. Though I doubt many mothers would disapprove of Harry fancying their daughter.

I couldn't say goodbye to Harry. I mean, I tried... but I couldn't.

Later, when Ron told me Harry might visit, I nearly fell off my chair.

This was going to be an interesting summer.

Chapter Three: The Diary of Tom Riddle

I still have nightmares.

I thought that after Harry defeated Voldemort, my nightmares would stop. They didn't. I still wake up in the middle of the night, drenched in sweat, my eyes red from the crying I can't control while sleeping, and find Harry stroking my hair, telling me that he loves me and that it's over and I'm safe.

Until JK Rowling's adaptation of Harry's life hit the bookshelves, very few people knew that I was the one who had opened up the Chamber

of Secrets and almost killed my peers. All they knew was the memory of Lord Voldemort had worked through a student. I preferred it this way. I didn't want people looking at me like I was a freak.

Lucius Malfoy couldn't have given me the diary of Tom Riddle at a more opportune time in my life. I was an adolescent girl on the verge of puberty, which meant my emotions were already in a spiral. I was starting my first year at Hogwarts which meant I had a lot of big Weasley shoes to fill. After I made the mistake of asking my brothers about Harry Potter, they teased me relentlessly about my "obsession with the Boy-Who-Lived."

To make matters worse, Harry visited. Don't get me wrong, I was ecstatic that we were under the same roof, but I couldn't seem to gather myself properly in front of him. I seemed to knock over at least one item when he was in the same room with me. Ron, the git, even told him that I fancied him, when I certainly felt no such thing. And, despite that I know Harry wouldn't care, I had never been so embarrassed when Mum told Harry that my school supplies would have to be second hand.

"Oh, are you starting Hogwarts this year?" Harry asked me.

These were the first words that *the* Harry Potter ever spoke to me. *Come on, Ginny!* I scolded myself as his emerald eyes met mine. *Do something! Say something witty! Oh, I know, say this: Yes, Harry, I am, but I doubt that I will be fighting any mountain trolls in my first year.* No matter how hard I urged myself, I was tongue-tied. Instead of witty remarks, I found myself nodding and then I stuck my elbow in the butter.

You can understand then why a diary would be the perfect companion for a girl my age. It was an outlet, a way to gather my thoughts, and a place to calm my growing crush. Little did I know that by pouring my soul into the pages of the book, that the book would pour itself back into me. I don't think even Lucius could have imagined the power of the diary.

When I found the diary mixed in with my textbooks, I thought nothing strange. I assumed it was mine, bought by my parents as a gift, and nothing more. Obviously, as the months passed, I figured out the

truth, but at that particular moment in time, I didn't think twice about it. I even remember my first entry.

Dear Diary,

We just got back from Diagon Alley and he's still here. Harry Potter is at my house. I can't think straight around him. I can't even talk around him. I'm so afraid I'll say something stupid. Fred and George always tell Lee what a clever little witch I am, but if I can't even speak in front of Harry, how can I show him how funny I am?

I was able to speak for the first time in front of him today. The new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor gave Harry all his books for free just because it would make a good front page story. Harry was embarrassed and didn't want the books. He dumped them in my cauldron... MY cauldron... and a really pale boy started teasing him. I don't know what came over me, but I defended Harry. The boy then had the nerve to call me his girlfriend and I shut up. I never blushed so much.

Mum said that I fancy him, but I don't know. I never felt like this before. If this is fancying someone, I want it to stop. It hurts. I want him to notice me, but all I do is spill my pumpkin juice all over myself.

I don't know what to do.

Ginny

With that, I closed the book and looked out my window towards the sky. The sun was setting, and the reds and pinks and oranges made such a beautiful tapestry of color. I felt better after writing and by looking out towards the horizon. I opened my book to add a little more.

And there was nothing there.

Perhaps I had mistaken where I put the entry. Forgetting about Harry for several seconds, I thumbed through the pages. When I found that it really was gone, I frowned and turned the book around. The words "T.M. Riddle" were emblazoned into the spine and I suspected that my new diary was not as new as I originally thought.

I reopened to page one, dipped my quill into the ink, and brought it close to the paper. I hesitated long enough for a droplet of ink to fall from the tip and onto the page. I didn't want to waste my time with another entry if it was just going to disappear again. As I contemplated, the droplet of ink faded away.

Curiously, I drew a straight line across the page and waited. The line, much like the dot, faded away into the paper. I drew an "X", and it was gone. I drew a heart, and it was gone. Half-smiling, I scribbled all over the paper furiously and watched my mess of ink fade away as if I had never touched the page.

This time, though, something was fading back onto the page. Staring at the marks forming across the page, I read the words, *"Excuse me, young lady, if you aren't going to talk to me properly, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to stop."*

Automatically, I dipped the quill and wrote back to the mysterious writer. *"I'm sorry. I didn't know..."* Know what? That you were a talking diary? How could I have known that?

Before I could continue, more words were etched into the paper. *"Apology accepted, Ginny."*

It knew my name and I realized that it must have seen what I wrote about Harry. Slightly embarrassed that my secrets were exposed, I wrote back, *"Oh... you read what I wrote earlier?"*

"It is me that must apologize now. Being what I am, I don't have much of a choice to read what you wrote. This is my diary, after all."

"Who are you exactly?"

"My name is Tom Riddle. And I'm pleased to meet you."

"Ginny Weasley, and it's nice to meet you, too."

"I couldn't help but notice that you sounded distraught. Would you like to talk about it?"

And that was all it took to be hooked on Tom Riddle. He was always understanding and always gave good advice. He encouraged me to be more myself around Harry Potter, but also said that I should not do so until I was ready. He advised me on how to handle my brothers. He assured me that I would do just fine in my first year.

Tom was a charming entity. He was exactly what someone like me needed. No one at the time understood me like he did. He was a friend that I could carry around in my pocket. He knew exactly what to say. Of course, looking back, I see what his intentions were... he wanted to rape my soul, use me to fuel himself. All I saw was a friend.

He let me ramble on and on about Harry. As you may have guessed, I had no problem with this. Harry was the one thing on my mind and I did not find it suspicious that he'd willingly listen to my problems. He seemed especially interested when I mentioned his defeat of a certain Dark Wizard.

"...he even defeated You-Know-Who twice."

"I'm sorry, Ginny. Who?"

I hesitated because saying Voldemort's name was taboo, but what about spelling it? I bit my lip, and hoped for the best. "*Lord Voldemort.*" I shuddered as I wrote the name.

"I have not heard of him. Who is he? How did Harry defeat him?"

With as much detail as I could pass on, I explained their interaction. How naïve I was!? How oblivious!? He asked many questions, even after I told him that I didn't know anything else. I thought he was curious. I thought he cared.

By the time school had begun, I had already started to feel the effects of Riddle. I told Mum that I didn't feel well when she kissed me goodbye on the train, but she told me I was just nervous. If she hadn't been concerned with me, she wouldn't have thought Ron and Harry had already boarded the train.

The first clue that something was wrong should have been the Sorting Hat. When placed on my head, the relic of Godric said,

“Another Weasley? You lot are full of determination, bravery, and power, and I can see you are no different. Such a small body, yet such a large heart. You have all the makings of a great Gryffindor, but such a strong connection to Slytherin, making this far more difficult than it needs to be. No doubt though where I will put you. You are in Gryffindor!”

I honestly remember very little about my first year at Hogwarts, and I don't just mean the times that my memory was completely blank and controlled by Tom. Everything that I did and everything I remember is in such a cloud. I don't even know what I was doing around Hagrid's house that afternoon.

I found myself staring at a large pumpkin. I couldn't even recall how I got there. I heard the roosters clucking in a nearby pen and I felt a twinge of familiarity with them, as if I had a task to do, but couldn't recall what it was supposed to be. My eyes found the hut next to the pumpkin patch. Smoke was wafting from the chimney. Ron had told me about his visits to Hagrid's hut and this must be it. Maybe... maybe Harry would be here.

From behind me, I heard a gruff-sounding voice say, “An’ you mus’ be the younges’ Weasley!”

I turned to the voice and saw the large man. I nodded and smiled warmly at the gamekeeper. I grabbed a small lock of my hair in my hands and showed him. “What exactly gave it away, Mr. Hagrid?” I asked, with a playful twinkle in my eye.

Hagrid chuckled. “Ron said yeh were a clever little witch. I’m glad ter see yeh don’ disappoint’,” he said. “An’ don’ yeh be callin’ me any Mister. I won’ answer ter nothin’ but Hagrid.” He patted me on the head. “What are yeh doin’ down muh way, Ginny?”

Not too keen on saying that I hadn't any idea, I responded, “Just looking around the grounds. I was hoping to find Ron, too. He said he'd introduce me to you.”

“Ron hasn’ been down yet,” Hagrid replied. “In fact, I should sen’ Harry a note an’ tell them ter come fer a spot of tea.” I blushed at the

sound of Harry's name, and Hagrid looked at me suspiciously. "Would yeh mind takin' a note ter him?"

"NO!" I cried louder than I intended. "I mean, I won't be up to the castle for awhile." I shifted my weight from one foot to another, trying to avoid Hagrid's knowing gaze. "Um..." I managed to say and looked at the pumpkins. "These are doing really good, Hagrid."

Hagrid nodded, and said, "If yeh come inside fer a cuppa, I'll let yeh in on some pum'kin growin' secrets." He motioned for me to follow him, and he added, "I wanted ter see how yer brother Charlie was doin' anyhow."

I followed Hagrid inside. I immediately liked the man. He might have been a tough-looking half-giant, but even a fool under the Confundus charm could tell he was a big softie. Charlie and Ron had told me separately about Hagrid's attachment to that dangerous dragon last year. I had hoped to have more conversations with Hagrid over the next couple months, but that was the last time I spoke to Hagrid in my first year.

That was also the last clear memory I had until after Halloween. I can recall going to class and eating my meals, but I felt as if I was under the Imperius Curse. I was doing what I was supposed to be doing, but not how I, Ginny Weasley, would have done it. Most of the teachers thought I was shy. Most of my peers thought I was strange. I kept writing in my diary, not thinking that the innocent-looking book was clearly the culprit of my new personality and actions.

My Halloween memory is a scary one. I came out of the fog in my dorm room without any clue why I was there instead of the Great Hall. I was sure I was making my way to the Halloween feast, but I couldn't remember ever arriving. Looking at my hands and my clothes, I found red paint all over me. This hadn't been the first time I found something on me that shouldn't have been there. I had even found blood and feathers on me a week prior.

Trembling, I reached for the diary. I wrote, "*Tom... I can't remember where I was tonight. It was the Halloween feast, and I don't think I ever made it...*" I waited for Tom to respond, but he was absent.

"Tom! Where are you? I need you!" No answer. I shouted loudly at the book, "TOM! ANSWER ME!"

I ripped off my stained clothing in a fit of rage and stuffed them out of sight. I could only imagine what had happened to me during my blackout. When I changed, I rushed towards the closest bathrooms and violently scrubbed the paint from my hands. Sobbing loudly, I backed up into the stall.

I stopped weeping when I heard Parvati and Lavender come in. "Who would write stuff like that on the wall?" Parvati asked. "Do you think it was blood? Oh, Lavender, it was disgusting."

"What is the Chamber of Secrets?" Lavender whispered.

"Maybe Fred and George's idea of a joke."

"Rubbish!" Lavender exclaimed. "You heard what Malfoy said. Fred and George aren't cruel like that."

"You're right," Parvati agreed. "And then there's Mrs. Norris. I don't think they would actually go as far as hurting her."

Everything about their story sounded familiar. I suppressed my weeping until I heard them leave. When the door shut, I couldn't stop the tears. I didn't even hear Hermione come into the bathroom until she knocked on the stall.

"Ginny? Is that you?"

I hiccupped and opened the door. "Hi." That was all I was able to get out. She fussed over me and walked me back to our dormitory. I think she may have even helped me put my night dress on and place me in my bed. I didn't sleep that night. Some way or another, I had grabbed the diary and furiously wrote everything I heard to Tom.

"Ginny," Tom finally responded, *"you're over-reacting. Would you ever vandalize school property?"*

"No."

"And would you ever hurt a cat?"

"No."

"Do you remember writing on the wall and hurting Mrs. Norris?"

"No... but I don't remember anything."

"Then you are not guilty."

"Do you know what the Chamber of Secrets is, Tom?"

"I do not. Ginny, it is late. You should sleep."

But I didn't sleep. And the next day, the memories became just as cloudy as before. I was upset for days, and Ron merely remarked that I was distraught because I loved cats. If only that were the reason.

Although Tom continued to reassure me of my innocence, I couldn't shake the image of red paint splashed all over my hands. To make matters worse, Filch suspected Harry. This upset me even more. I was afraid that he and Ron and Hermione were going to be expelled. Percy even tried to convince me that nothing bad was going to happen to Harry.

But as more and more attacks happened, the more and more distraught I became. Justin and Colin and Nearly-Headless Nick were attacked and once again I couldn't remember where I was or what I was doing at the time. I was terrified.

Percy found me wandering aimlessly around the Gryffindor common room one evening. "Ginny," he said quietly, "are you okay?" When I shook my head, he said, "You look so pale. Have you been sleeping?"

"I don't like to sleep." I swallowed hard. "If I sleep, I have nightmares."

"What's been going on with you, Ginny?" Percy asked. "You're so outgoing at home. I told Mum that you would give Fred and George a run for their money this year, but you haven't been acting like yourself."

"I don't know what's wrong with me," I replied. I don't recall saying goodbye to Percy, but only walking away into my room. I automatically reached for the diary.

"Are you there, Tom?"

"Hello, Ginny. How are you?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going mad, Tom. I can't think straight. I can't sleep. I'm not myself."

"Yes, yes, my child. We have spoken about this before. Have there been any developments between you and Harry?"

"I'm not talking about Harry!"

I slammed the book shut. How could Tom be thinking about something like that when there were people lying up in the hospital room petrified? How could he pretend that it hadn't happened? How could he ignore my desperate pleas of help? I couldn't remember where I had been when any of the attacks happened.

Fuming, I opened the book up and wrote, *"I think I'm the one attacking everyone."*

"Ginny, you must not blame yourself. Why don't you tell me more about your family? You promised to tell me what your brother Charlie does for a living and you haven't done so yet."

"Why are you trying to stop me from thinking about it?"

I nearly screamed again at the diary. Why was he ignoring my desperation? That's when a revelation struck me hard. Somewhere in the back of my mind where the real Ginny Weasley was still residing, there came a strong thought. He wasn't ignoring it. He was distracting me. Whatever was happening, whatever strange things that were

taking place inside my eleven-year-old world, was connected to this diary... to Tom Riddle. I had to get rid of it.

And I did. I gathered up all the courage that my little self could muster and I chucked it into the girls' bathroom, the same in which Moaning Myrtle haunts.

Slowly, I began to feel normal. Percy remarked that I was looking more and more like myself every day and mentioned that he wouldn't have to write to Mum and Dad. Though the winter clouds blocked out the sun, I never saw a more beautiful sky. I was feeling grand and not even storm clouds could ruin my mood.

I even gathered up enough courage to send Harry a singing Valentine. I know the poem was ghastly, but Mum always said girls do strange things when we fancy a boy. I just never expected to actually be there when the horrid little dwarf delivered the message. The thing tackled Harry and sang my words to him, in front of everyone... including me... and Draco broke my heart when he told me that Harry hadn't liked the Valentine. I covered my face and ran away.

I don't regret sending that Valentine though. If I hadn't, the dwarf wouldn't have knocked Harry's books all over. If that hadn't happened, I wouldn't have known that Harry found the diary. I couldn't let Harry keep that book. I couldn't let him discover what I had written to Tom... my secrets... If Tom told him that I was the culprit, I couldn't bear to have Harry look at me as if I were a freak. And, most importantly, I couldn't let Harry fall victim to the diary like I had.

So I waited until the boys' dormitory was abandoned and stole the diary back.

"Did you tell him anything?" I wrote furiously to the diary.

"I told him lots of things, Ginny."

"Did you tell him about ME?" I was crying again.

"No. Your secrets are safe."

I tried not to write in the diary as much, but I couldn't shake the need for it. The power of the diary was far stronger than before. Tom was acting different. It was a side I had never seen and I suspected that he was acting more like himself than ever before.

"You will not get rid of me again, Ginny."

"I'm sorry, Tom. I was scared. I didn't know what to do."

"Fear is for the weak. I will not have you being weak."

"I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to be bad."

"There is no good or bad. There is only power and those too weak to take it!"

For the first time during my ownership of the diary, I understood what it was. No, not as a Horcrux or a part of Voldemort's soul, but as an evil object that wouldn't stop until I was no longer my own. The cloud came back over me. The nightmares returned. Tom was now guiding me in everything I was doing and though I was completely aware that I was under his control, I could do nothing to stop it. I couldn't fight back anymore. Tom was in my mind.

I almost broke free after Hermione and Penelope were attacked. When I saw Hermione, frozen, stiff, and rigid, I fought as hard as I could, but a voice inside my head whispered, *"No, no, little Ginny. You're not going anywhere."*

I think I tried to tell Harry and Ron. There was an echo inside my head that kept repeating, *"I need to tell you something."* It sounded an awful lot like my own voice, but then another voice inside my head that said, *"You're not about to ruin my plans for him."* And then Percy came and sent me away from the table.

I don't even remember writing the last message on the wall. The words, "Her skeleton will lie in the chamber forever" stared back at me. My hand had written it, but it was him that had forced me. I knew what he was doing. He was using me. He was going to use me to get to Harry.

I tried to run. But my feet were not my own. I lost all consciousness right there, and the next thing I recall I was lying in the Chamber of Secrets.

"Hello, Ginny," the voice said, but it wasn't coming from my head. I looked at the book beside me, and it wasn't coming from the diary. I turned and saw him. Tom Riddle. Black-haired, tall, a bit lanky, and transparent.

Although I already knew the answer, I asked, "Are you... are you Tom?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to kill me?"

"Yes."

I choked back a sob. "W-why?"

"Ginny, Ginny, Ginny," Tom chanted, "you have been such an asset. You were so willing to share everything. You were so willing to pour your heart out to me... to pour your soul... And that was all I ever wanted from you... all I ever needed."

"I trusted you!" I cried.

"Then you were weak!" Tom spat. "There is no such thing as trust! Put no trust in a person. They will only betray you. Put fear into a person and they will do anything you so desire." He hummed to himself evilly.

"You're wrong."

"Am I?" He bent closer to me. "Did you not fear me?" he asked, not requiring an answer. "And did you not obey me?" His eyes turned towards the entrance to the Chamber, awaiting someone's arrival.

"Who... who are you waiting for?"

"Let us hope that young Potter is as foolish as you make him out to be."

"Not Harry!" I cried, growing weaker by the second. "Don't hurt him. Do anything you want to me... just... don't kill Harry."

"The same boy who doesn't notice you? The same boy you pine over? He doesn't love you and he will never love you! You are willing to die for *him*?"

"Y-yes..." I mumbled. It wasn't fog encircling my mind, it was black. "I would die for... for Harry..." More blackness... *Is this death? This isn't so bad... It's peaceful...*

"Then you are a fool like him," Tom scoffed. He leaned even closer to me. I was almost lost to the prevailing darkness. He came next to my ear, and I could feel the vibration of his voice. If he had breath, I think I may have felt the warmth. He whispered, "I am going to kill you both."

And I was gone.

The next thing I remember is opening my eyes and seeing his face. Harry Potter. Harry. My hero. I scanned the room. The basilisk lay motionless on the ground, its head in a small pool of greenish liquid. Harry's front was drenched in blood. Although the cloth around his shoulder was torn, as if something had pierced him, I saw no injury. I followed the blood stains down his robes to the diary in his hands. My eyes snapped back up to meet his piercing gaze. I began to cry.

Any shy feelings I felt towards Harry vanished. I started rambling. I gave Harry a tear-stained, verbal confession of my deeds. He assured me that it was okay and that Riddle was gone and the diary and the basilisk were destroyed. He took my hand as I kept rambling incoherently about being expelled. I made a mental note that Harry was holding my hand but I felt no romance towards that, only relief.

He led me away from the Chamber. When we found Ron and Lockhart, he didn't explain what had happened nor that I was the guilty one. I was grateful for it and it made me cry even harder. I

didn't even care that Ron called Moaning Myrtle my competition with Harry.

I listened to Harry's tale of the past school year, how he heard voices, how they visited that horrid spider, how Hermione had figured out what was attacking the students. I listened to the terrified exclamations of my parents when Dumbledore revealed that Voldemort had bewitched me. I listened to the disappointment in their voices when I told them about the diary. The well of tears seemed to have no end.

Dumbledore, at last, revealed that no permanent damage was done and that no punishment was going to take place. I couldn't have been happier. I followed his instructions and left for Madam Pomfrey. Looking over me, she prescribed nothing more than hot chocolate and a warm bed to sleep in.

Hours later, I awoke in the bed, praying that the delieverance from the diary hadn't been a cruel nightmare. I held my breath as I sat up. Looking around, my gaze came to rest upon Professor Dumbledore holding a steaming mug.

"You can breathe, Miss Weasley. It is only me." His eyes twinkled behind the half-moon spectacles. He raised the mug to his lips and sipped softly. "Hot chocolate has always been one of my favorites after a long, hard day. Did Madam Pomfrey give you a mug?" When I nodded, he continued, "Can I sleep easy tonight knowing that it has helped you?"

Surprisingly, it had. "Yes, Sir."

"I thought I would tell you in person that your schoolmates have been restored to normality," Dumbledore said. "Miss Granger is quite worried about you."

My eyes began to tear up. How could I face Hermione after what I did to her? How could I face anyone? Everyone must have known by now that I was the one attacking the students. Maybe Mum could teach me at home or send me to a different school. Maybe I could start over. I wiped my eyes.

"I have told no one, of course, that Voldemort was acting through you," Dumbledore said, as if he was able to read my worried mind. "That information is yours and you may divulge the information to whomever you wish."

The strain on my heart lessened. "Thank you, Sir."

Dumbledore gazed at me intently through his glasses. Raising the mug again to his lips, he sipped the liquid. As if debating whether or not to say anything further, the man stood up, wished me a good day, and turned to leave.

"Professor, wait," I said hoarsely.

Dumbledore paused beside his chair. "Is there something you want to discuss?" He turned back to me and set himself in the chair again.

I nodded. "Am I weak, Sir?"

"Goodness," Dumbledore replied. "Who ever said that you were weak?"

"Tom did," I said softly. "He told me that I was weak to trust."

"Ah," Dumbledore said. "Voldemort has always had the talent of making people doubt themselves. Do not stop trusting, Miss Weasley. That is the mark of a truly powerful person."

"But I trusted the diary!"

"And you also trusted Harry."

I was silent. I ran that through my mind while Dumbledore took another long sip. He was right. I trusted Harry and he came through for me.

Dumbledore lowered the mug from his lips and placed it in his lap, still grasping onto it. "Allow me to ask you something. Did you steal the diary back from Harry because you did not want him to know how you feel about him?"

My cheeks went scarlet. How did this man know so much? "Yes," I replied. "But..." I frowned as another tear found the corner of my eye. "But I also couldn't let Harry fall under the diary's power. I just couldn't..."

"And do you think yourself weak for willingly and deliberately putting yourself back into harm's way to protect another?" Dumbledore asked, a twinkle in his eye.

He was right. After all, Voldemort would never sacrifice himself to protect any of his followers. He would rather see them perish than to ever be harmed himself. Reaching a conclusion, I said, "No, Professor."

"I sense you are destined for great things, much like your hero." He said hero with pride in his voice. "Am I right in thinking you are the seventh child of your family...?"

"In seven generations, yes."

Dumbledore nodded. "It is said that seven is the most powerfully magic number," he said. "You are not weak, Miss Weasley." His words left no room for argument. He lifted the mug to take another sip and his eyes darted towards it. "Oh dear, I seem to find that I am in desperate need of a refill." He stood up and turned from my bed. With one hand on the chair's back, he said, "If you are well-rested, your friends and brothers are waiting for you."

I threw the cover off of my body and stood up. I followed Dumbledore to the exit and parted ways with him. I walked towards Gryffindor Tower, towards the dormitories where I had spent all year inside writing to the diary, and towards the very people that I had set a basilisk on...

I immediately dismissed that thought process. It was Tom Riddle, no, Lord Voldemort that controlled the basilisk. And he didn't succeed, because once again, Harry was there to stop him. Harry was there to save everyone.

Harry was there to save me.

And for the first time in that whole school year, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace.

Author's Note:

Some may not agree that the Sorting Hat might consider Ginny for Slytherin and I don't think it would either if Ginny had not been under the influence of Voldemort already. Voldemort's Horcrux in Harry was surely one of the reason why he was considered for Slytherin, and I am convinced it would have been similar for Ginny.

Chapter Four: The Seventh Child in Seven Generations

For the remainder of my first year, I had a foolish fantasy about Harry Potter. The whole scene played out in my head. I was the damsel in distress and Harry was my knight in shining armor. From miles away, he came to rescue me because he loved me. And when he had slain the monster that held me captive in the topmost tower, we would share a kiss. We would ride off into the sunset on his noble steed.

It was apparent after three days that this was not the case. Harry rescued me not because he loved me, but because I was the one taken. Had it been Ron, had it been Hermione, even a student he had never met, Harry would have done whatever he could to ensure their safety. That's just the way he was.

I found myself being okay with that. I took another big step and admitted to myself that I fancied Harry. I decided it was time to stop acting like a little girl. Harry had saved my life and I think it would be a shame if I couldn't be myself in front of him. If I was ever going to catch his eye, I was going to have to be more than a damsel in distress.

Although we were excused from taking the end of term exams, before school officially ended, Professor McGonagall gave me a small folder of papers. Inside were all the spells, charms, potions, and information that I was supposed to have learned in my first year. She said that for obvious reasons, I had been distracted and she didn't want me to be behind when my second year started. If I could do all the required work over the summer with little problems, then second year would not give me any trouble.

For the first three weeks of the summer, I worked extremely hard. In my altered state of mind, I had learned many of the charms and incantations. Though I can't recall ever processing that information, I had little trouble remembering most of what was required. On the day before we left for Egypt, Mum tested me and I passed. I wouldn't need to repeat my first year.

I was still having nightmares. Practically every night, I saw Riddle coming out of the diary and taking over my body. I saw myself hurting my friends and family and hurting Harry. I would awake in the middle

of night in a cold sweat, whimpering and crying. Mum heard me every time and she never failed to comfort me, no matter how late it was.

Fred, George and Ron were officially deemed my protectors. They barely left me out of their sight that summer. I was grateful for it. During the breaks of sightseeing and studying, we would spend many hours playing Wizard's Chess.

Two days before the end of July, Dad left dinner abruptly to take an owl. When he came back to the Inn, he looked extremely distressed. We were waiting for him to inform us, but he sat down without saying a word and began to eat his food.

Mum spoke up first. "Arthur, what is it?"

He chewed what was in his mouth carefully, swallowed, and put his fork down. "I suppose I should tell you," he said. "You'll be reading about it tomorrow anyhow." He nervously tapped his index finger against the table. "There was a break-out at Azkaban."

Mum gasped. The twins both said in unison, "No way!"

"I thought it was impossible to break out of Azkaban," I said. Mum had always threatened us with a stay in the wizard prison when we misbehaved. She had always said that no one could escape.

"Well, yes," Dad replied. "So did we. No one knows how he did it. He was just... gone." He looked from me to Ron to the twins and to Percy. "I'm trusting the Ministry will have caught him by the time we return, but if not, you must all be careful. I won't always be here to protect you. He's a dangerous man."

Mum stood up and began to pace. When she came behind dad, she placed her hands on his shoulders. "Arthur," she said softly, "who was it?"

"It was Sirius Black, Molly."

Mum's eyes almost fell out of her head. She gasped again. "No!"

"Who is Sirius Black?" Ron asked.

"A murderer," Dad answered. He had said it with such disdain as if the word was something far too personal. I looked at my brothers and I could tell they all thought the same thing. Before we could ask any more questions, Dad repeated, "I want you to be careful..."

"Did Black do anything else?" I asked.

"No," Mum said quickly, but her eyes gave her away. Black had wronged the Wizarding world in some way that was far worse than being a murderer. I knew it, but neither parent was about to divulge that information. If that were the case, I would need to find out the sneaky way.

I had always prided myself in finding out things I was not supposed to know. If our parents refused to tell us something, I was the one who usually overheard the information. Fred and George called me their "extendable ears," which is where they originally got the idea. In fact, I knew a great deal more than I usually let on, more than anyone would have ever guessed.

Once everyone was in bed, I slowly crept to the door outside my parents' room. I heard Mum crying softly. Dad was trying to comfort her. "Molly, there is no need to worry. He will be safe for the time being. You know what kind of protection Dumbledore has on that house."

"I know," Molly cried, "but he's so alone in there. We have to bring him to us. We can at least give him a real home. That's the least we can do after what he did for Ginny."

Harry. They were concerned about Harry.

"He is safer there than anywhere," Dad said firmly. "Black can't touch Harry there. Harry may not be comfortable, but he is safe."

"Are they sure that he's after Harry? Are you sure that's why he escaped?"

"He kept repeating '*He's at Hogwarts*' days before he escaped. They are sure." Dad sighed loudly. "The Ministry does not want us to tell Harry about Black."

“And we should not!” Molly hissed. “It would break his heart, the poor boy. He has been through enough! He does not need this to add to his pain.”

“I would rather him hear it from people who care about him, than through rumors of those who don’t,” Dad said.

I listened with disbelieving ears. A murderer was on the loose and he was looking for Harry, though it appeared that there was more to the story than I understood. It once again was not going to be a quiet time at Hogwarts. I strained my ears to listen for more.

The door opened and Mum stood there in bewilderment. “Ginny?” she exclaimed. “What are you doing?” Her hands were on her hips, sign number one that you better start talking.

“Um...” I muttered. *Come on, Ginny.* “I had another nightmare,” I lied. Mum’s anger immediately subsided and she took me in her arms. *That was a close one,* I thought. And when I slept, I actually slept soundly. It was unusually quiet that night.

It wasn’t quiet when we found out days later that Harry had disappeared from the Dursleys’. Dad assured us that Ministry officials were trying to locate him. He was troubled, too, though he would not admit it. I was worried out of my mind, though I figured if anyone could take on an escaped prisoner of Azkaban and live to tell the tale, it was Harry. Fudge thankfully located Harry within hours of his exodus from the Dursleys’.

Although we tried to find Harry when we reached Diagon Alley later that month, he was no where to be found. When Mum, Percy, the twins, and I walked into the Leaky Cauldron and finally found him with Ron and Hermione, I breathed a sigh of relief. Immediately following this sigh, I felt my heated cheeks and the returning crush. Realizing that I still was unable to pull myself together in front of him, I murmured a hello.

Before our departure for Hogwarts the next morning, the nightmares paid a visit. This time, I saw Voldemort and Black both coming out of the diary to kill me, and when they did, they set their sights on Harry. Though I was dead, I felt myself screaming.

"Ginny!" I heard Hermione's voice call for me, and I snapped up in bed, almost giving Hermione whiplash. "Ginny, are you okay?"

I lifted my hand to wipe the sweat away. "Peachy," I muttered. I closed my eyes and forced my breathing back to its normal pace. When I lifted my eyelids, Hermione was still sitting beside me, holding my hand. "Honestly, Hermione, it was just a nightmare. I'm not dying."

"You gave me a fright," Hermione admitted. "Are they always this bad?"

"I've had worse," I replied. Her brown eyes were filled with concern. She cared, but I didn't know why. I had tried to kill her, for Merlin's sake. Although most people might understand that I was not acting under my own volition, I doubt they'd willingly sleep in the same room with me.

"Are you okay?" she asked. I think we may have been better friends earlier if it hadn't been for the diary last year. She was a genuinely caring person and a very loyal friend. And brave. She had to be. She would eventually marry my brother. That requires a right bit of bravery, if you ask me.

I nodded, and she added, "Get cleaned up and we'll go downstairs for some breakfast."

After I got showered and changed, Hermione and I walked towards the Leaky Cauldron's dining room. "Dumbledore sent me a letter," Hermione said. "He said that if you want for this year, you are allowed to room with me."

At first, I was suspicious. I thought the Headmaster was trying to keep a watch on me because he thought I might go into a Voldemort relapse. I frowned, but then I recalled another detail. Or rather, I *didn't*. I couldn't tell you who my roommates were in my first year. I understood. Dumbledore knew that I needed someone to be a friend. "I would like that," I told her. "I... never made any friends."

Hermione grinned. "And my closest friends are two boys," she replied. "I need a friend more... *my gender*..." and her smile widened. "Not that I don't appreciate my boys..." She stopped, realizing what she

had said. *Her boys.* Her face went red. "I don't mean... of course they're not... mine..."

"I know, Hermione," I said as I giggled uncontrollably. I pointed at her cheeks. "You're starting to look like me when Harry's around." *Was that a joke about my crush on Harry?* I asked myself. That was the first time I had hinted to anyone that Harry meant more to me than just a friend. Hermione always had that effect on me. I was always able to talk about my unrequited love for the Boy-Who-Lived around her.

As we reached a table and sat down, her hands touched her skin. She broke out laughing. "I was under the impression that you felt no such thing for Harry," she said, not trying to hide the playful sarcasm. I shrugged, not responding. She continued, "If you want my opinion, I think the idea is grand."

My smile grew about another three inches, I swear. "Really?" I asked and she nodded. "But he doesn't even know I exist," I replied glumly.

"He knows," Hermione assured me. "But he's only thirteen years old. All boys our age are daft! I don't think Ron has even noticed that I'm a girl yet."

I raised my eyebrows in a questioning manner. Had Hermione just...? Yes, I think she just admitted to liking my brother. How interesting. "Hermione, do you fancy...?"

"Fancy who?" Mum said, seating herself between us and setting three cups of tea on the table. She caught Dad's eye, who had been reading *The Daily Prophet*, and winked at him. Hermione shifted uncomfortably in her seat. "Don't be so bashful, Hermione. I'm sure I can offer maternal advice."

My eyes scanned Hermione's. She looked sheepishly at me. *Aha!* I thought. *She does fancy Ron!* I would definitely have to look into this for further developments.

"Don't provoke the poor girl, Molly," Dad said, stuffing his face back inside the newspaper. "She doesn't need a love potion brewed up."

Mum laughed. "Arthur, I was young *and* trying to make you jealous."

"You used a love potion, Mum?" I said, amused. I glanced at Hermione; she lost the red in her cheeks and now a smile replaced it.

"Some boy named Chip in our sixth year," Mum replied, laughing at the memory. "Your father was playing hard to get. I took drastic measures."

Her laughing was infectious and soon Hermione and I were giggling loudly. I was even able to stay in high spirits when Harry and Ron rejoined us, noting that if I had turned the slightest shade of red, it must have been from the laughing.

I thought Hermione's newfound friendship with me would bring me closer into the group. Ever since Ron came back from his first year, this had been a dream of mine. I had wild hopes that I would join all their adventures. Even though I *would* eventually join their group, they always had that nasty habit of keeping me uninformed. It took me many years to realize that they needed each other in a way I never fully understood.

Things were going great with my plan. After Harry and I shared a laugh over Percy at the train station, I thought I was good to go. Imagine my disappointment when Ron told me to go away on the train.

"Oh, that's nice," I said, staring daggers into him. Walking away, I thought he would like to keep a better watch over his baby sister, especially since a murderer was on the loose, not to mention that this was my first day back as a Hogwarts student NOT under the influence of a particular dark wizard.

Walking through the corridors, I felt hopelessly lost. The only difference between me and the First Years was that they had already found their places. Looking to the left, I saw Colin Creevey laughing with a few friends. I felt jealous and angry. Maybe I could find Fred and George... Maybe Percy... *What?* Had I really just considered finding Percy to share a compartment with? I'd have to put up with him talking about his recent promotion to Head Boy.

“Would you like to share a compartment with me?” called a small voice from behind me. I turned to find the source.

I recognized the girl. Her waist-length dirty blond hair hid a long slender object behind her ear. Upon closer inspection, I realized it was her wand. She lived near the Burrow. In fact, when we were six, we play together a lot, but that was before she had scared me away, telling me that I was infested with Invisible Womnails.

“Everyone is playing this marvelous game with me and I can’t seem to get into anybody’s compartment,” she said, her eyes dreamingly looking around. “Do you remember me, Ginny? I’m Luna.”

“I remember you.”

“I wasn’t sure,” she said. “You stopped coming around after your infestation. After you were debugged, I thought you might come back.”

What do you say to something like that? There were so many places to start. I might have gone with the fact that I had not been infested with Invisible Womnails. I might have gone with the fact that Womnails do not even exist. I could have, but it didn’t seem to matter. “I think this compartment is free,” I said, pointing to the one beside me.

I slid the door open and stepped inside. Luna followed and sat down. Seated across from her, I hoped that she would want to talk about something normal, like who the new DADA teacher was going to be, or how it wasn’t fair that we weren’t allowed in Hogsmeade until next year. I was not so fortunate. She chose a subject that was a bit too personal.

She reached behind her ear and grasped the end of her wand. “I’m glad Harry Potter defeated that basilisk,” she said. She pulled her wand out and tapped her hand with it.

Out of all the stories she could have chosen, this is what she wanted to talk about? I muttered, “Me, too.”

“He saved you, didn’t he?” Luna’s eyes grew bigger as she realized who I was. Or maybe she had pieced it together before that but decided it was a good time to make her eyes as large as saucers.

“Yeah.”

“I’m glad he did,” she said, twirling her wand. “You didn’t have any friends last year.”

Ouch. Luna always had that incredible habit of speaking truths no one was ready to hear or chose to ignore. “I was a bit...” *possessed?* “...shy.”

As if she hadn’t heard what I said, she continued, “Neither did I though.” She placed her wand back in its place behind her ear. “At least you had that diary.”

My eyes shot up and met hers. I could feel my annoyance level rising. She hummed to herself a tune I’m pretty sure she had just made up.

In the conversation, I hadn’t noticed the train had stopped. I was merely concerned with getting out of that compartment without being rude. My chance came when the lights went out. Confused and frightened, I slipped out of the compartment. As I exited, I swear I heard Luna say, “Wow. This must be the longest blink I’ve ever had.”

Groping my way in the dark corridor, I could hear my fellow students all whispering and shouting. When I passed by Colin’s compartment, I heard his friends all whooping and hollering. Colin said, “Harry Potter will take care of this.” Moving on, I heard the loud hiss of Hermione’s new cat, Crookshanks. When the muffled voice of his owner followed, I knew I had found the compartment I was looking for.

I heard the door fly open and someone slammed into me. I yelped in pain, and the person did the same. “Who’s that?” I heard.

I asked the same question back.

“Ginny?”

“Hermione?”

“What are you doing?” she asked.

Quickly, I answered, “I was looking for Ron...”

“Come in and sit down,” Hermione replied.

If she thought it was going to be easy, she was mistaken. I blindly found my way into the compartment and sat down as soon as I could. Imagine my embarrassment when the seat I had found was already taken. “Not here!” I heard Harry hiss. “I’m here!” Oh, I had never been happier to be in the dark, but I am surprised the heat of my blushing cheeks did not create a small source of light.

I jumped up immediately and felt my foot stepping on something. “Ouch!” I heard a different voice whimper. Apparently, I had landed on this person’s toes. I was about to offer my apologies, but a strange deeper voice spoke.

“Quiet!” I could hear in the corner someone moving and rustling around. A wand lit up and I saw a face I did not recognize. It was a man, but he looked exhausted, except in the eyes. The dark eyes darted towards the door, alert and ready. “Stay where you are.” He stood and took a step towards the entrance.

Not even on his second step and the door slowly opened. I saw the cloak hovering above the floor and I knew immediately what it was. Dad had talked about them when he visited Azkaban. Mum would warn us about them whenever we misbehaved. I had seen their picture in textbooks, but no amount of explanation or looking at sketches can communicate the sheer horror of seeing one close up.

It was a dementor. They are faceless to everyone except to those unfortunate enough to see it. If you catch a glimpse of its skin, you’ll catch a glimpse of what you might look like after you were dead for a decade. And no feet... like ghosts... but at least ghosts have their own souls.

The dementor drew its breath in and I felt the compartment drop ten degrees in a matter of a second. An icy grip clawed at my heart, trying to get inside. I was trembling from the terror deep within.

Did you not fear me? And did you not obey me?

I was back in the Chamber of Secrets. I watched Tom Riddle hovering over my ever-weakening body, grinning manically. Tears, those heavy droplets of depression formed in my eyes and were released on my cheeks.

I am going to kill you both.

And as quickly as the creature had come upon us, it was gone. I don't recall the mystery man charging the dementor with his wand, but I caught why they were there. They were looking for Sirius Black. I suppose it made sense, I decided, to send the Azkaban guards after an escaped Azkaban prisoner, especially one as dangerous as Black. And it made sense that they were there if Black was looking for Harry... but they were foul creatures... and why they made Harry collapse like that was beyond me...

I must have made some sort of cry for help because I found Hermione's comforting arm around my shoulder. She hugged me closer and whispered, "They're gone."

I shuddered. In a low voice, I replied, "I know..."

"Is that what they do, Ginny?" she asked quietly. "I saw the night my grandmother died of a heart attack... the worst night of my life..."

"Make you relive your worst memories..." I said. I heard the man ask Harry if he was all right and I heard Harry respond with *fine*.

"You were back in the Chamber," Hermione said. She wasn't asking. She knew. That was another great trait of hers, knowing how her friends were feeling and understanding before we ever did.

When we arrived at the Hogsmeade station, the Golden Trio went off on their own again. I looked around anxiously and found the boy that shared our compartment waiting for me. He motioned for me to walk with him, and I was happy to have found someone to travel with.

He had looked pale on the train, but his color was returning to normal. "Feeling better?" he asked me.

"A definite improvement," I replied. "And yourself?"

"The same," he said. He extended his hand as we continued walking. "By the way, I'm Neville." I took his hand, shook it, and told him my name. "Ron never introduced us. You're the youngest Weasley, aren't you?"

"Nah," I said coolly. "We got another litter waiting at home." He looked confused and I chuckled. "Nevermind. You reckon the dementors will be around this term?"

"I hope not," Neville replied. He gave a great shudder. "I never want to be near one again."

"What did it make you see?" I asked, before it processed. *That* was a very personal question. I hoped I wouldn't scare off this new friend.

Neville stopped when we came to the line for the carriages. I thought he muttered something about his parents, but at the last second, he changed his tune. "I don't remember," he said. "But it can't be as bad as what Harry experienced. You saw him faint."

"Potter fainted?" a voice from behind us called. I turned to see Draco Malfoy flanked by two dodgy-looking characters. I remembered Draco all too well. "Is that what I heard you say, Longbottom?"

"Yeah, but only because the dementor..."

"I didn't see anyone else faint," Draco grinned. His cronies sniggered behind him. He looked at me. "Of course, you might have if Potter smiled at you."

It was not a good thing for Draco to know so much about me, but I thought I would share one more piece of information with him. "I hope you haven't forgotten that I have four older brothers at this school, Malfoy," I said hotly. "I would hex you myself, but I wouldn't want to deny them their sibling duties."

Before the blond Slytherin could respond, I heard a familiar voice from behind me. "Hop on the carriage, Ginny! The carriages aren't going to wait long for you!" It was Luna, waiting for someone to join

her. Neville and I quickly joined Luna on the carriage. I glanced back at Draco with daggers in my eyes.

Rooming with Hermione that year proved to be Dumbledore's best idea to date. He understood my need for someone understanding and she was the girl for the job. Lavender and Parvati fawned over me as well. They thought my crimson-colored locks were absolutely stunning and were constantly asking if they could style it. I agreed on the first night and they tried to curl it. When Colin laughed hard at me at breakfast, I vowed never to let those girls touch my hair again.

News travels fast at Hogwarts. The information spread quickly that Hagrid's first lesson with the third years ended badly. I was pleased that it wasn't his fault, but rather Draco's. It was icing on the cake to hear the blond haired git's arm had been broken.

The bad news was that Lucius Malfoy was not happy with his son's injury. With many threats, Hagrid was feeling lousy. I decided to pay the Gamekeeper a visit. I walked alone for a second before Colin and a girl I didn't know came up beside me.

"Hey, Ginny!" Colin greeted in his overly friendly kind of way. "Where are you going?"

I explained to him and he thought the idea was a good one. He introduced me to the girl. Her name was Delia Regal and she seemed like a nice enough person. They walked beside me and ultimately decided to join me.

"Do you think they locked up the hippogriff yet?" Colin asked as we came near Hagrid's hut. "I'd like to ride it like Harry did."

"You can't ride that monster, Creevey."

The three of us looked behind us. Two short and stocky Slytherins were grinning at us. I recognized them as Julius Harper and Daemon Vaisey. They were ugly gits and more than likely had some hag blood somewhere in their family history.

"They already locked it up!" Vaisey continued. "Ever since it attacked Draco, his father has been furious." He and Harper moved closer and

he added, "I wouldn't be surprised if that poor excuse for a teacher is sacked before the week is over."

"The hippogriff didn't attack Malfoy," I said, rather annoyed. "Malfoy didn't listen to a word Hagrid said." Colin, of course, nodded in agreement.

Before anything else could be uttered, the door of the hut swung open. Hagrid sauntered out with a small feed bag. When he closed the door and turned around, he was surprised to see five students crowded outside his hut. "What are yeh lot doin'?"

"We wanted to come for a visit," I said, and the Slytherins behind me scoffed.

"I'm about ter..." Hagrid started, scratching his big bushy beard. He motioned for all of us to follow him. "Well, what if I show yeh? Since I can't teach any more lessons with Buckbeak, I had ter prepare somethin' else."

I expected my fellow Gryffindors to follow, but I was surprised when Harper and Vaisey also joined us. Hagrid led us past the gardens where he grew the pumpkins last year and stopped us in front of the chicken coop. I glanced nervously around. Riddle had high-jacked my body multiple times last year to pay the chickens a visit. I had been forced to kill the roosters since their crow was fatal to the basilisk.

My fellow students and I edged closer to the pen to see what magical creature Hagrid had in store for the older students. Inside the enclosed area, I saw a chicken. I did not understand why Hagrid looked so pleased with the bird.

"Can any of yeh tell me what yer lookin' at?" Hagrid asked.

Harper stepped forward to get a better look. "It's a bloody chicken!" He laughed and Vaisey soon joined in. Harper turned towards Hagrid. "Have you lost your nerve already?"

"Not jus' a chicken," Hagrid replied. He reached into his pocket and extracted a handful of bird seed. He threw it in. He pointed to the bird,

which had begun to peck at the ground. "A chicken's feathers are all white. Look it at this one when the sun catches it jus' righ'"

I stared for a long moment at the chicken. As it lifted its head to look at us, the light from the sun caught its feathers. A golden sparkle emanated from the feathers. I gasped at the beauty.

"What is it?" Delia asked.

"Sarimanok," Hagrid answered. "Jus' recently discovered in the Philippine islan' chain by Leon Scamander. They're rare, the lot of 'em."

"Still," Harper scoffed. "Why is the bloody chicken so great?"

Hagrid looked at the rest of us. "The natives claim that it's good luck ter catch an adult if yeh manage ter do it without magical means, but the luck is only supposed to work *once* randomly."

He reached into his sack and pulled out a handful of bird seed. When he threw it into the pen, the sarimanok started pecking at its food. "This one here is only a few weeks old. They say this youngin's luck works randomly only fer people yeh interact with instead of fer yehself."

"Why is it here, Hagrid?" I asked, wondering if it was such a rare and new find, then why wasn't someone studying it?

"Scamander reckons it could cut down the time it takes ter make the Felix Felicitas potion."

"Liquid luck!" Vaisey said, obviously impressed.

"Is Snape going to work with it?" Colin asked.

Hagrid shook his burly head. "An old Potions professor is comin' ter pick it up. Ever hear of Horace Slughorn?" I shook my head, and the others did the same. "Genius with the cauldron, he is. Great at makin' the liquid luck, one of his specialties. Time consumin' though."

"You said the luck only works when you catch one," Colin said. "Is it hard to catch one?"

"Buggers to catch. Darn near impossible," Hagrid said. "C'mere, Colin." He motioned for Colin to enter the pen. Colin looked extremely excited. He turned to me and placed his camera in my hands. He bolted towards the entrance and immediately took off running after the sarimanok.

For nearly five minutes, we watched in amusement as Colin failed to capture it. Even when the bird seemed cornered and facing defeat, it managed to escape his grip. Finally, Hagrid called Colin back after he had lunged headfirst into the side of the pen.

"That's enough," Hagrid said. "Rumor has it that sarimanok are excellen' judges of character. They can sense the eager an' the excited. When they trust, yeh know they be trustin' fer good reason. Who else wants a go?"

One by one, we lined up to catch the young bird. We laughed so hard. Harper and Vaisey could barely even get close to it. I observed everyone else's advances. Each one was fast and quick, yet all had failed. I was worried when it came to my turn. After Hagrid said it was an excellent judge of character, I started doubting myself. When it came to my turn, I attempted to ignore those feelings and took the opposite approach.

I walked slowly to the middle of the pen and sat down. I heard Harper snort behind me. I smiled coyly to myself. I picked up a seed that the bird had missed and placed it between my index finger and thumb, and I waited. I watched the sarimanok study me, hopping closer and closer. The sparkle in its feathers met my eyes once and I squinted.

A few inches from me, the bird lowered its head to look at the seed. It made a noise and quickly snapped the seed from my fingers. Taking my chance, I reached slowly towards the creature and felt my hands slowly wrap around its body. It didn't struggle. Picking it up delicately, I held it in my lap and stroke the gold tinted feathers. I felt a nice warmth pass over my body... a sign of victory... a sign of luck...

"Well done!" Hagrid called excitedly. "Ten points ter Gryffindor!"

"If only you could pass that luck to someone of your choice," Hermione told me later in the dorm. "I need it for all the work I'm doing," she said as she leafed through one of her textbooks.

"It doesn't work that way," I replied. Hagrid let me keep a feather of the sarimanok as a souvenir for a job well done. "If I could choose who and when I give it to someone, I'd give it to Harry in case Black catches up with him." I looked closely at Hermione for her reaction.

She looked up as quickly as I predicted. "Who told you Black was after Harry?"

"Oh, no one," I said casually. "I just have my ways."

Without another word, I pointed my wand at my light, muttered the appropriate incantation to extinguish the candle, and settled comfortably under the covers. Before I turned to my side, I heard Hermione mutter to herself, "A clever little witch indeed."

Pulling the covers up to my chin, I drifted towards sleep, thinking how much of a great first week back it had been. As dreams finally took over reality, I saw Harry inside my head, thanking me for giving him the luck he needed to defeat Sirius Black.

The castle was relatively quiet for the next two months. Hermione was always busy and spent most of her free time with Ron and Harry. Neville and I spent a lot of time together. We both silently yearned to be a part of the Golden Trio. Luna was growing on me, though it would still be three years before she and I would be closer. Surprisingly, Colin was also growing on me. After all, we shared a common interest. (Sometimes I think he fancied Harry the way he talked about him.) Delia Regal, the girl I mentioned earlier, was slowly becoming a friend. Professor Lupin proved to be an amazing teacher and it was always fun to have DADA with the Ravenclaws.

The peaceful time didn't last too long. On Halloween night, Black broke into the castle and scared the Fat Lady right out of her picture. Fortunately, the only harm done was the ripped portrait. Soon after that, the dementors attacked Harry during the Hufflepuff vs. Gryffindor Quidditch match. Watching Harry fall from that height was the single most terrifying thing I went through that year.

Blushing furiously, I stepped into the hospital wing. I had made a get-well card for Harry. I hoped he would be asleep so he wouldn't see me lay it beside him. No such luck. Harry looked up as I entered. I clutched the card tightly. He managed a weak smile. "Hello, Ginny."

You can do this! I told myself. "H-h-hi," I managed to squeak out. "I'm sorry about your broom, Harry."

He frowned. *Good one, Ginny. Make him feel lousy.* "Er, thanks," he muttered.

"I think... I think Ron is going to bring you some candy from Honeydukes." I commended myself for holding an actual conversation with him.

He frowned again. *Catching a thousand snitches today, aren't we, Ginny?* "That would be nice," he mumbled.

Not wanting to say any more to make a complete prat of myself, I shakily handed the card to him and said very quickly, "Imadethisforyouihopeyoufeelbettergoodbye." My cheeks were once again burning and I fled the room.

Walking as fast as I could, I slammed straight into Fred and George. George dropped a large bit of parchment that looked as if it had seen better days. I stared at it from where I stood and noticed the shape of our school and dots moving all around.

"*Accio map,*" Fred shouted, and the parchment flew swiftly up into his outstretched hand. He folded it up, but not before I caught the words "Moony" and "Prongs" and "map." Fred smiled at me. "Where are you off to in such a hurry, little sister?"

"If I didn't know any better, we'd think you were running from trouble," George said, grinning.

"Not trouble, just embarrassment," I replied. I eyed the parchment again. "Was that a map of Hogwarts?"

"Ask no questions..." Fred started.

But I cut him off "...and you'll tell me no lies?" I finished for him. "Come on. You know the two of you are my favorite brothers." I put on the best possible pouty face I could muster.

"Favorite brothers?" George repeated. "You hear that, Fred?"

"I heard," Fred replied. "It's funny she should say that since we have scarcely seen her since the school year began." He placed a hand against his forehead in a distressed manner.

"It's like she has no brothers," George mock sobbed.

I smacked both of them, one hit on each arm. "If I have no brothers, then I guess I can show mum all those treasures under the floorboards of their closet." I whipped my hair as I turned around.

"You fight dirty," Fred said.

"But all is fair in love and war," George reminded him. "And sibling-to-sibling relations."

I stopped and grinned. It's not too difficult to know exactly how to work them. After all, I am their favorite sibling, but don't let the others know that. Once they called me back, I knew this was another one of the countless secrets that they were about to let me in on.

I followed them to an empty classroom and George shut the door. Fred placed the parchment on a desk and George joined us as we peered at the paper. It was a map of Hogwarts and each of the moving dots was titled with a name. I followed the corridors until I found our classroom. Lo and behold, my name was on the map next to my twin brothers' names.

"This is one of our most beloved treasures," Fred said.

"Did you *make* this?" I asked, impressed with the amount of magic and skill it took to complete this.

"You flatter us," George replied. "No, my dear sister, we acquired this in our first year."

“Rescued it from Filch’s office,” Fred added.

“We used it at first to get into Hogsmeade when we were younger,” George informed. He pointed to each of the secret passageways that lead away from the castle.

“And this map shows *everyone* in the castle?” I asked.

“Everyone,” Fred and George said in unison.

I stared at the map. My eyes couldn’t help but relocate to Harry’s dot only two rooms away. When I saw it, a thought sliced across my mind. “If you can see everyone, then you can see when Sirius Black is on the grounds!” I exclaimed.

“What do you think we’ve been trying to do?” Fred hissed.

“We can’t keep an eye on this map all the time,” George said. “We suspect that Black is smart enough to stay off Hogwarts ground as much as possible. He must have thought everyone would be distracted on Halloween.”

I watched Hermione and Ron walking side by side away from Gryffindor Tower. They must be journeying to the hospital wing to visit Harry. That’s when the epiphany hit me. “You should give this to Harry,” I said quickly.

Fred and George stared at me. After a few seconds of awkward silence, they both burst out laughing. “You always were the funny one!” George cackled, holding his side.

I placed my hands on my hips and glared at them, reminding myself of Mum. “I’m serious. One, Harry could actually go to Hogsmeade and stop sulking over it....”

“Ginny, I think your heart is thinking for your mind...” Fred interrupted.

“And two...” I hesitated because I knew not a lot of people were supposed to be aware of this information. “Sirius Black is here because... because he wants Harry dead.”

That shut them up. "Are you sure?" George asked.

"I heard Mum and Dad talking about it before term started," I replied. "And you know I don't lie about this kind of stuff."

Fred and George looked at each other. They mouthed a few words and then looked back at me. "We will take your suggestion into deep consideration," Fred said.

"Because this little thing has done wonders for us and it won't be easy to part with," George added.

"We have several weeks before the next Hogsmeade weekend. We'll take the time to mull it over," Fred finished. He and George placed their wand onto the map and both chanted, "Mischief managed." Fred rolled the parchment up, slipped it into his robes, and departed from the room with the map.

I smiled coyly to myself. I knew they would make the right decision.

I spent a lot of time during the Christmas season with Hermione. Harry and Ron were mad at her for making Harry's Firebolt broomstick out to be a murderous weapon sent by Sirius Black. Though she was right about who sent it, it was less than murderous.

It was during times like these that I got to spend time with one of the Golden Trio. When one was mad at another, the neutral party was forced to divide his or her time between the bickering friends. The friend that was left alone usually ended up spending more time with me. I am ashamed to admit that I secretly hoped for these fights. Not that Colin, Neville, Luna, or Delia were bad friends.

It was also during these times that I was well-informed. While spending afternoons in libraries with Hermione, she would divulge information to me that she most likely wouldn't to anyone else. She asked me how I found out about Black wanting to hurt Harry and I told her about listening in to my parents' conversations.

"Eaves-dropping," Hermione said to me.

I pretended to be hurt. "I wouldn't call it eaves-dropping. It's not my fault I listen better when no one thinks I am." I gave her a sly smile. "You'd be surprised how much I know."

"Oh really?" Hermione said. "What else have you learned recently?"

Thinking about another of the Trio's conversation I heard, I said, "I know that Sirius is Harry's godfather, and I know there's a terrible reason that he was in Azkaban, but I haven't quite figured that out yet."

Hermione, feeling lost without her two best friends, let me in on the most recent developments. Sirius was the secret-keeper... betrayed Harry's parents... killed Peter Pettigrew... and I wanted to find Harry and give him the biggest Ginny hug ever.

Hermione had another falling out with Ron several weeks later. Her cat apparently ate Ron's rat. It wasn't Hermione's fault and Ron never really liked that rat anyhow. Harry ended up siding with Ron on this one, and once again, I found myself in the library listening to Hermione complain about Ron.

"It's not like I can control what Crookshanks hunts," Hermione said hotly. "He has a mind of his own."

"Ron can be a real prat sometimes," I assured her. "He'll get over it and you'll both go back to normal as soon as possible."

She turned furiously through pages in her books. Either she desperately needed to find something or it was just distracting her. "I miss him," she said, making a disgusted face as if the words hurt her.

"I'll never understand why you fancy my brother so much," I muttered.

She slammed the book she was searching through shut and glared at me. "I... do not... fancy... your lousy... childish... brother!" With each word, she had risen a few more inches out of her seat and now she was towering over me. Trembling, she regained her composure and apologized to me multiple times.

I had no problem with her anger. She wasn't kidding me and she wasn't kidding anyone. The way those two were always bickering, it would be a miracle if one of them *did not* fancy the other. I didn't press the issue any more that year, though it would be a major topic of conversation over the coming years.

Once again, the atmosphere of Hogwarts was peaceful. I had heard that Lupin was giving Harry private lessons to help ward off the dementors so at least that problem would be diminishing.

At the Gryffindor vs. Ravenclaw match, I sat with Colin and Hermione. Colin was taking non-stop photos and would not stop talking my ear off about how much he loved Quidditch and how his mother didn't understand it and his father... Quite honestly, I stopped listening the moment I saw Harry take the field.

He scanned the clouds for dementors, looking much more confident than ever before. When he looked at the opposing Seeker, I noticed a tremble in his demeanor. I recognized those actions anywhere.

"Hermione, who is that Ravenclaw girl? The Seeker?" I asked.

"Cho Chang," Hermione answered. "She's a 4th year..."

"I don't like her," I said.

"Don't like her?" Hermione seemed puzzled. She glanced up at Harry on his broomstick, who was nervously giving Cho quick looks. "Oh."

When Gryffindor won, the feelings of absolute domination were cut short by Ron's terrified screams. When my brother awoke, Sirius Black had been standing over him with a knife. Whether Ron was the target or was merely confused for Harry, it didn't lessen our fears. Hermione and I were terrified.

After that night though, Black made no more visits to the castle. The last Quidditch match cheered us all up a bit with Gryffindor winning. I thought I saw Oliver Wood crying. Once again, things turned peaceful. End of year exams came and I did extremely well. I hoped Mum would be pleased.

I awoke with a start. The room was quiet, except for the steady breathing of Lavender and Parvati. I shook the nightmares away, wondering why Hermione had not come to my side. She had trained herself to be aware of my sleep schedule and would awake when I was back in the Chamber. I looked over to her bed, but the sheets were uncharacteristically flat.

I sat up. The full moon's light illuminated the room in an eerie glow. I stood up, put my slippers on, and journeyed to the window. As I neared the pane of glass, I heard the faint cry of a wolf echo through the grounds. I stole one more glance at Hermione's bed before turning my attention back to the beautiful radiance of the night.

What is that?

A strange silhouette was against the faint sky, resembling a hippogriff with two riders. I couldn't be seeing such an absurd scene, for the creature had been sentenced to death only hours prior. The moon didn't provide enough visibility for me to identify the riders as they settled near the West Tower, in the shadows and out of sight. After several minutes, the silhouette returned, yet this time, a third rider, taller than the other two, had joined the group. They descended into the shadows.

What a curious scene. I pressed my face against the glass, trying to peer into the shadows and locate the bizarre midnight posse, but I could find... *wait...* The hippogriff was rising again, but this time without two of its riders.

I glanced over to Hermione's bed; the clock blinked 11:54 P.M. It was almost midnight and she wasn't tucked safely in her bed. It was dangerous to be wandering, especially with a crazed murderer on the loose. Should I try to find her? It wasn't against Hermione's character, so I decided that I would wait for her until she returned.

When I lay back down, I didn't expect to fall back asleep. When I awoke four hours later, I bolted up in bed and scanned the room. The bed that belonged to my closest friend was still empty and it appeared not to have been touched at all tonight. The full moon had almost set.

I jumped out of bed quickly and slipped on my trainers. I didn't care anymore what time it was or if I'd be in trouble for being out so early. I rushed out of the dorm, out of the Common Room, and ran as fast as I could outside. I stopped on the front steps, searching the ground quickly for any sign of Hermione.

That's about the time that I saw him. An incredibly large, black, and furry creature had appeared from out of the early morning mist. It looked like a wolf, but it couldn't be... wolves don't stand upright...

...but werewolves do...

I backed up one step and drew my wand. I was pretty sure I didn't know any spells that could affect a werewolf. I took another step backwards and up one stair, keeping the monster in my range of sight, ready to sprint if it saw me.

I noticed the creature was limping and its shoulder was bleeding. I thought I could hear it whimpering. It didn't appear threatening as it came closer. I could see it was wearing familiar shabby robes. It stumbled as it reached the first step.

As the creature looked up at me, the last trickle of moon that was visible dropped below the horizon. The monster's transformation back into a human started in the feet and worked its way up from there. The fur looked as if it was being sucked back into the skin. I heard the bones cracking and reshaping. The claws of the wolf trembled and formed back into hands. The wolf eyes stared into mine and the next instance, I saw the man behind the monster.

"Professor Lupin?" I exclaimed. I stuck my wand back into my robes and I rushed to my teacher's side. My teacher? My teacher was a werewolf? I wondered if Dumbledore was aware. "Are you okay? What happened?"

"Black..." he muttered.

"Sirius Black did this to you?" I almost shouted. I ripped the bottom of my robes and tore off a large piece of fabric. I placed the piece across Lupin's shoulder and tied it under his arm. I applied pressure to it.

Lupin moaned. "...not his fault. I... turned into... and he was trying to protect Harry... and Ron... and..."

"He was trying to protect...?" I questioned, confused. Maybe Lupin's head got knocked silly. "Why would Black want to protect Harry?"

He shook his head. "We were wrong," he said, trying to stand. I helped him get to his feet as he said, "He was framed... he was trying to get to Pettigrew..."

Maybe Lupin wasn't aware that Peter Pettigrew was dead. "Let's get you to Madam Pomfrey. She'll fix that shoulder."

Supporting Lupin's weight, I managed to help him to the hospital wing. On the way, I managed to get the whole garbled up version of the night's events. Scabbers as Peter Pettigrew... Black as an animagus... Harry, Ron, and Hermione... Snape... Peter was the secret-keeper... Peter betrayed Lily and James... Peter framed Sirius Black... I would have to get the full story from Hermione later...

In the hospital wing, we barely had time to notice three occupied beds near the back. Madam Pomfrey treated Lupin, who had regained his composure. He ignored her constant insistence to stay in the hospital wing and turned to leave. Pomfrey excused herself and Lupin turned back to me.

"Thank you, Ginny. Most students your age would have ran at the sight at me and I doubt many would have bothered to help." Lupin smiled warmly. "You are a brave, little witch. I'm going to miss teaching you."

"You're not coming back?" I asked with a disappointed look in my eyes.

He shook his head. "It's a miracle no one pieced together my furry little problem," Lupin said. He was grinning now. "Severus has been kind enough to not share my secrets. I would say that after tonight's events, he might feel less inclined to keep it to himself."

I felt anger rise up inside of me. It wasn't right. Lupin was a great person and a wonderful teacher. "But if what you said about Sirius is true, then you were doing the right thing."

"Parents will only care about what I am, not the good deeds I have done, Ginny, you know this," Lupin replied. He stood there shaking his head. "Now it's time for me to get some rest before I start packing, and *you* shouldn't be out so late."

"I think you mean early," I replied.

Lupin checked his watch. "Indeed," he said. He placed a hand on my shoulder and led me to the door. "For now, Ginny, keep what you know to yourself. Can you promise me this?"

I promised him. "Do you want any help packing?"

He declined. I said farewell and departed from him. I walked back towards Gryffindor Tower. I was trying to comprehend the events. Lupin was a werewolf. Sirius Black was innocent. Scabbers was guilty.

"Up so early, Miss Weasley?"

I turned around and saw Professor Dumbledore stepping out from the shadows. *Great*, I thought. *I'm in trouble*. "Good morning, Professor."

"You must forgive me for not checking up on you this year," Dumbledore stated. "I am sure you are aware of how busy I have been."

"Yes, Professor. I understand."

"Did you find your sleeping arrangements to be beneficial to you?"

The Headmaster had just found me wandering around so early and he was discussing how I had liked my dorm rooms? Nodding, I said, "Hermione has been a big help to me."

"As I thought she would be," Dumbledore said. "I've always said that friends are much better companion than a diary."

I laughed. "Especially ones holding You-Know-Who's memories." Dumbledore chuckled and something that had been bothering me flashed across my mind. "Professor, how was he able to do that?"

"I have my suspicions," Dumbledore replied. "But since I do not have enough evidence yet, I cannot say."

"Will you tell me when you know for sure?" I asked hopefully.

"I do not want to make promises I might have to break," he said simply. "If you will excuse me, Miss Weasley, I have somewhere I need to be. I am sure that you were not aware how early it was otherwise you would have still been tucked comfortably beneath your covers."

"Thank you, Professor."

"It is a dangerous time to be wandering the corridors," Dumbledore said. "In fact, just last night, we had apprehended an intruder and he escaped beneath the Minister's watchful eye."

"Black got away?" I said excitedly. I stopped myself, remembering what I had promised Lupin. I covered my obvious mistake. "I mean... what do you mean?"

He eyed me curiously and continued. "Coincidentally, you are not the only student wandering so far from warm beds," he said. "In fact, I was on my way to the hospital wing to visit them."

My mind raced back to the three occupied beds in the hospital wing and I pieced the information together. The Trio had been hurt. Before I knew what I was saying, I shouted, "Did Peter hurt them?"

Dumbledore did not say anything. He raised his eyebrows in a questioning manner. I was not sure if he was going to ignore my comment or question me further. "No," he said. "It is not in his nature to be brave. I suspect that Pettigrew escaped and will not be coming back."

He turned to leave, but stopped. "I trust you can keep everything you heard to yourself? You may know the truth about Sirius Black, but I fear the Ministry is will not to be so understanding."

"I promise, sir."

"I had no doubts," Dumbledore said. Before he turned to leave, he waved a farewell. "You never cease to impress me with your knowledge, my dear." And without another word, the Headmaster continued on his way.

When I entered the Common Room, I noticed someone sitting on the couch. When I walked closer, the figure looked up and noticed me. It was Colin.

"You dropped this earlier," he said in a small voice. He held up my sarimanok feather as it glimmered gold in the rising sun.

"Colin?" I said, sitting down next to him. "Why are you up so early? You should be sleeping."

Colin shrugged. The camera that he usually had with him was not present. I studied his face and realized just how small he was. He ran his free hand through his mousy brown hair. "You're up, too," he said as I sat down beside him. "Besides, I like your company."

Frowning, I looked at Colin. He looked embarrassed as if he had said far too much already. I wonder what he would think of me if I told him it was me who attacked him last year, that it was me who had let the basilisk petrify him through the lens of his old camera. I wonder...

But I couldn't wonder anymore. Colin was kissing me. It wasn't a kiss worthy of being called the greatest, nor was it a short one. I was bewildered and confused, but a warm feeling passed from my body. When Colin stopped kissing me, he stood up, blushing. "I'm sorry, Ginny."

"It's okay, Colin," I said softly, not really knowing what else to say. Many thoughts raced through my mind. I didn't fancy the boy but I certainly didn't want to hurt his feelings. I fancied Harry and always envisioned my first kiss to be with him.

"I've fancied you all year," Colin started. He twiddled my feather in his hand. "But I saw the way you acted when Harry was around..."

My turn to blush.

"...and I mean, I don't blame you because Harry is the best... But I thought maybe this morning, I might... or I thought you might..." His free hand was tapping the side of his leg. "I thought I might be allowed to kiss you...." He held the feather out to me and smiled. "...with a little bit of luck..." He dropped the feather in front of me and walked away towards the boys' dormitory.

The feather floated listlessly, slowly descending until it came to rest on the lap of my torn robes. The gold of the feather was no longer present. And I realized what the warmth had been that passed from me. It was the sarimanok's luck passing from my body and giving Colin the courage to do what he had been afraid of all term.

I sat there for a few minutes, turning the feather over in my hands, and thinking about the previous ten months. I was proud of myself. I was able to act somewhat like a normal human being in front of Harry, I had gained the respect and friendship of Hermione, and I had made friends. I had certainly made up for last year's debacle.

As the morning grew older, I touched my lips with my free hand where Colin's lips had touched. No, I still didn't fancy Colin, but he had given me my first kiss. For that, I found I had a goofy grin on my face.

I couldn't *wait* for Hermione to come back so I could tell her.

Chapter Five: Clever Little Witch

"You win again!" I said glumly to Ron. He had taken my king with his bishop. I stood up from the kitchen table. My brother may not be able to beat me when it came to flying or pure magical prowess, but when it came to Wizard's Chess, Ron was the man.

"Rematch?" he asked, smirking and obviously proud of himself.

"I don't like losing you to you," I snarled.

"You make it sound like a bad thing," Ron replied. "Come on, Ginny. I need to practice my victory dance one more time."

I made a face at him and changed the subject. "When are Harry and Hermione getting here?"

I knew mention of his two closest friends would capture his attention. "Hermione is coming a day before Harry," he said brightly. "And Dad is going to get Harry the day before we leave for the Quidditch World Cup."

My eyes sparkled. I was looking forward to Harry's arrival. The kiss from Colin gave me a new kind of courage. If that boy could take his eyes off Harry long enough to notice a simple girl like me, then why couldn't Harry notice, too? Maybe I could actually talk freely in front of him this time around.

"How do you think the match will be?" I asked.

Ron jumped up. "Bulgaria has Krum. I can't see how they are going to lose."

"But Charlie has a point," I countered. "Krum is only one player. Ireland's whole team is brilliant."

Before Ron and I could continue our conversation, Mum walked into the room with a cage and an eccentric looking owl that Ron had brought home with him, though I didn't quite buy his story that he had just found it. It was the size of a fist and the most adorable thing I had seen for a long time.

"I found this owl cage up in the attic," Mum started. I recognized the cage. It used to belong to Charlie, if I wasn't mistaken. "I think your owl has enough room to stretch its wings in there."

"Of course he does!" Ron mocked. "He's as big as a pigeon."

"Shut up, Ron. He's adorable," I defended the owl. I opened the cage door and the little bugger took off around the kitchen, knocking over plates and bowls, and creating one big mess.

"We can't keep calling it *your owl*, Ron," Mum said. Ron had failed to name the bird yet. I secretly thought he was waiting for it to turn into a man like Scabbers had.

The owl landed on the bowl of fruit that Mum had placed on the counter earlier and started nipping at the grapes. I giggled. "He really is yours, Ron. He's eating like a pig."

"A bloody pig pigeon," he muttered.

I tried to suppress another giggle. Ron had reminded me of when I was younger just learning to talk. Whenever we would pass by a big flock of birds, I thought they were pigeons. Like many children, I had a hard time saying certain words and the word *pigeon* came out of my mouth sounding more like *widgeon*.

After my giggle fit subsided a few moments later, I whispered, "Pig Widgeon."

Ron looked at me questioningly and it dawned on him what I had said. "No, Ginny. I'm not calling him—"

"Pigwidgeon! Come here, boy!" I called to the bird. Its big eyes stared at me, processing the name. It hooted once in confirmation and acceptance. Arching its wings, it flew over to my outstretched hand. "It likes it!"

"I don't like it," Ron growled.

Mum, who was busy cleaning up the mess, agreed with me. "Besides," she said, "once an owl accepts a name, it's nearly impossible to change."

"Heracles!" Ron called to the owl in frustration. "Apollo! Lancelot!" None of the names affected the bird. Scowling, he muttered, "Pigwidgeon." The owl immediately fluttered excitedly over to Ron and nipped him in the ear. "I don't even get to name my own owl."

"I think it's a sweet name," I responded matter-of-factly.

Ron attempted to change the subject. He sniffed the air and asked, "What are you cooking, Mum?"

Mum called Pigwidgeon over to her and placed the newly-named mail carrier back into its cage. She looked at Ron and said, "I'm making cake for the Lovegoods. I promised them that I'd give them some the next time I was baking. I'm headed over in a few minutes." She waved her wand and a beautifully decorated cake appeared on the table.

"To Loony's?" Ron muttered.

I smacked him. "Her name is Luna," I hissed. "And she's a very nice girl. She's just..."

"Mental?"

"Different," I replied, staring daggers into his body. "She helped me a lot last year."

A small tremor in the house interrupted our conversation and I felt dust fall into my hair.

"Fred! George!" Mum screamed. I heard an apology from upstairs. "What are those boys doing up there all the time?"

I brushed the dirt from my locks and decided to pay the twins a visit. "I don't know. I'll go see." I left Pigwidgeon, who flapped its wings wildly. Climbing the staircase and arriving at their door, I knocked.

“Who is it?” Fred called out.

“Your mother!” I yelled in my best imitation of Molly Weasley. “Open this door right now!”

The door unlatched and I walked in. The room was smoky and Fred and George’s faces were a bit ashen. “Hello, boys. Spell gone wrong?”

George smiled, wiping the dirt from his eyebrows. “Spell gone right, more like it.”

“It sounded like a catastrophe!” I said. “What are you doing up here?”

Fred quickly got up and shut the door. “You have been kind enough to keep our secrets...”

“And are you going to repay my kindness?” I asked.

George stood up. “You have proved yourself worthy.” He walked over to his wardrobe and pulled open the doors. He rummaged through some papers and grabbed one. “This...” George couldn’t hide his excitement as he handed me the paper. “...is what we have been doing.”

I took the paper. “Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes?” I read. I scanned the paper. It was an order form. “Does this mean...?”

“We are open for business,” Fred chanted. He explained that they had been working on products for over a year now, perfecting their brands of trick sweets and fake wands. They had secretly advertised near the end of last term and many of the students were very receptive to the idea. They were operating by owl mail order.

“Impressive,” I said. I hadn’t realized that all their chaos was going to pay off.

George bowed to me and chuckled. “As soon as we have enough money, we are going to create some heavy duty stuff and find our own premises.”

“Don’t let Mum hear you say that,” I said. She had always dreamed that her sons and I would find good-paying jobs at the ministry.

“We wouldn’t dare break the good news to her so soon,” Fred stated.

I handed the paper back to him. Pointing at the now diminishing smoke, I asked, “What was all this then?”

“That, dear sister...” George held up his hand. Between his finger and thumb was a transparent blue piece of candy. “...was the sweet sound of success.”

“It’s a toffee,” I replied lamely as he put it into my hand.

“Not just any toffee,” Fred said. “This is the final product...”

“Or at least we hope...” George interjected.

“...the first in a line of candy guaranteed to make you wheeze in laughter,” Fred finished.

I rolled the candy in my palm. “What do you call it?”

“Ton Tongue Toffee,” Fred said. “We have been trying everything out on ourselves but we want to make sure it works on others the same way.”

“So we need to find a willing candidate.” George flashed a smile at me. “Are you free?”

I shook my head quickly. I was done with strange objects. Not that I believed the candy would possess me, but I figured I should exercise a bit more caution. “Not going to happen,” I stated.

“We wouldn’t anyhow,” Fred said. “It wouldn’t be too smart to test right under our mother’s nose. What we really need is to find some unsuspecting little git...”

“Draco Malfoy for instance,” George suggested.

“Or Marcus Flint,” Fred replied.

I sat down on their bed and stretched out to relax. I smiled, thinking about all the names they were saying and how much fun it would be to see some of them subjected to my brothers' candy.

"Do you think Harry would want a toffee?" Fred asked.

I looked up, noticing that he was grinning widely at me. He knew that name would gather my attention. I raised a disapproving eyebrow.

"We *are* going with Dad to pick him up," George said, also waiting for my reaction.

"It's not going to work," I replied lamely. Their teasing had stopped making a significant impact on me as of late. "Besides, I doubt you'd be able to get it past Harry's cousin."

The three of us abruptly stopped moving. I'm fairly certain they were thinking the exact same thing I was, as if we were struck with the same idea at the same time. We had heard the stories of Dudley Dursley and his diet. Three smiles slowly crept up on our faces.

Fred reached into my hand and took the candy back. "We couldn't *give* it to him, of course..." he said carefully.

"...but we don't have any control of what he does if we *accidentally* drop it," George finished. George winked at me. "Thanks for the inspiration, sis."

As Fred and George chattered away, I smiled to myself. I knew that Harry would get a kick out of Dudley's misfortune and the twins wouldn't pass up the opportunity for something so devious.

It amazed me how much magic and skill had to go into creating their candy. It required ability and patience that I didn't know they had. After they finally opened their joke shop two years later, Mum said that if only they put their talents to something useful, then they could do much better than a joke shop.

I supported them. Maybe it was the fact that they trusted me enough to tell me their secrets. Maybe it was that they respected me enough

to listen and consider my suggestions. Of course, Mum is proud now of *Wheezes* and she will swear that she always felt this way.

The following day, when the twins were de-gnoming the garden, Mum had the urge to clean and went into their room. They never saw it coming.

I was sitting at the kitchen table enjoying a snack when Mum stormed down the stairs and slammed a stack of papers onto the table. I almost choked on my chocolate when I saw that they were the order forms.

"Did you know about this, Ginny?" Mum asked me, and I considered lying. Luckily, the twins saved me.

"Do you think we'd tell our dear little sister?" Fred asked. He and George were standing in the doorway of the kitchen.

George was still holding a gnome in his hand. The little guy was squirming around in his hand. "No one else knows."

"Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes," Mum read the top of the order form. "Fainting Fancies... Fever Fudge... Wildfire Whiz-Bang... Do you mind telling me what you think you are doing with order forms?"

"We've been busy..." Fred said. "Inventing..."

"Inventing?" Mum shrieked. "So you had time to play inventor but no time to take your OWLs seriously?"

"We took them seriously," George replied.

"But Professor McGonagall didn't know how many OWLs we'd need to open a joke shop," Fred added, and I suppressed a laugh. "So we had to guess."

"A JOKE SHOP?" Mum screamed. "I thought we agreed you were going to work in the ministry with your father?"

"Technically, we never agreed," Fred reminded her.

“We simply said we would consider it,” George added.

“And we considered it...”

“And decided we would rather make people laugh...”

Mum looked like she was about to kill. She took out her wand and the twins stared wide-eyed at her. The gnome that George had been holding fell to the floor, kicked him in the leg, and scampered off through the door. I backed my chair up so all spells fired would miss me in the crossfire.

“Mum, think about this,” Fred whispered.

Mum pointed her wand at the stack of order forms. “*Incendio*,” she shouted. The papers went up in flames and the twins stared in horror. She waited until the last ember had burned out and she looked at them. “You will not make any more of these.” She left the room.

I sat there stunned, looking at the paper ashes sitting on the table. I glanced up to the twins and tried to express my condolences of having their dreams shattered, but they were smiling. They were *actually* smiling.

“Sort of gives us a whole new determination,” Fred said, answering my questioning eyes.

“Like we have to prove her wrong,” George affirmed.

“Thanks for not ratting me out,” I told them.

“We know you’d do the same for us,” Fred said. He and George said nothing else as they went upstairs to their room.

Things were tense around the house for days. Dad, who was secretly impressed with the twins’ abilities, was forced to act like he was angry. He would threaten them with claims to tell our mother about their shenanigans.

When Hermione arrived, the tension in the house had subsided a considerable amount. I helped her bring her bags into my room and we sat down to chat.

"How has your summer been?" I asked.

"Far too quiet," Hermione admitted. She explained how it is extremely difficult living in the Muggle world and not being able to use magic or see magic every day. "If I were to ever be expelled, I don't know how I'd go back to living there."

"You get expelled?" I rolled my eyes. "With the grades you get, they should be begging you to stay."

Hermione grinned. "There'd be no one to watch over Harry and Ron."

"Do you think I'd let them wander off into trouble alone?"

"Doubtful."

"I might have to think twice about looking after my dear brother," I grinned. "But Harry..." I trailed off. Somehow or another, my conversations with Hermione always came back to that same boy. I was able to stop myself before I went any further.

"I know," Hermione said. "Have you been in contact with anyone over the summer?"

By anyone, she didn't mean Luna or Delia or Neville. She meant Colin. "Hermione," I started, "I told you I didn't fancy Colin."

Hermione shrugged. "You said you liked the kiss."

"I said I didn't mind it," I corrected her. "Besides, I think the sarimanok's luck prevented me from hating it."

Hermione replied. "I just think it would be adorable."

"You want me to give up on Harry then?" I questioned her. Had she talked to Harry over the summer? Had he expressed to her his utter

disgust with me and how he could never ever see himself fancying me?

"Of course not," Hermione stated. "I just think you should maybe date other people. It wouldn't hurt for you to see what else is out there."

"Maybe you should take your own advice," I muttered a bit too loudly. I tensed, ready for the grumpy Hermione to start rising out of her seat and claiming undoubtedly that I didn't know what I was talking about and that Ron was not the only other thing on her mind besides reading *Hogwarts, A History* for the seventeenth time in a row.

She didn't. Her cheeks reddened and she nervously twitched her hand. Finally, she said, "You're right. I should take my own advice."

My mouth was agape. "You do fancy Ron?" I never thought I'd live to see the day that Hermione admitted this to me.

"I don't know what I feel," Hermione said defeated. "I mean, I didn't think I did, but then I remembered what you said to me last year, and I started thinking about things. I thought about how I was worried that Ron didn't know I was a girl and I thought about how much we fight and I thought about how much I missed him when we weren't talking. But then I thought that I missed Harry, too, so I couldn't possibly fancy Ron if I missed Harry, but I don't fancy Harry, and I don't worry this much about Harry..."

I rubbed my temples as she continued to speak. "Stop," I commanded and she abruptly ceased talking, aware of how much she was saying. "I don't think I understood one thing you just said."

She took a deep breath. "In other words, I am still trying to figure out how I feel. I think this year I'm going to research the problem."

"Research the problem?" I repeated. "You make this sound like homework."

Hermione shrugged. "That's how I figure things out."

I laughed as she smiled. "You're putting an awful lot of thought into this."

“We can’t all be so sure of our feelings like the great Ginny Weasley.”

“I am great, aren’t I?” I gave her a sly look and she rolled her eyes.

Hermione and Ron, I thought to myself. I did like the sound of it. And if there were anyone I would want for a sister-in-law, it would be her. She was smart and organized and logical, the complete opposite of my brother. Ron was smart but he had to be pushed to find it. Organized and logical? Definitely not. That’s why he needed Hermione. It’s a shame that it took them close to four years to finally figure out exactly how they felt.

Harry arrived the following day. Hermione and I came downstairs to Dad trying to cover up for the twins’ practical joke on Dudley Dursley. I caught Harry’s eye. He was grinning. He must have loved the idea that his prat of a cousin had suffered a hundred pound tongue. My cheeks turned hot as I admired his smile. I took pride knowing that I had a hand in putting that grin on his face.

My admiration was cut short when Hermione gathered us up and left the twins and my parents to discuss the situation. Harry asked us about the twins’ business and Pigwidgeon and Percy. Ron and I informed him of the things he had missed. I was very proud of myself because this had been the most I had ever spoken in front of Harry.

Sitting in Ron’s room, Ron started to say, “And have you heard from...” before Hermione shot him a look. He averted his eyes from us.

I stared at Ron curiously, waiting for him to finish what he was going to say. It was obvious to me that he was about to ask about Sirius. Everyone was aware that he had escaped miraculously from the tower, but no one knew how. I suspect that the Golden Trio and a certain hippogriff might have assisted, but I wasn’t quite sure of that. I hadn’t yet spoken to Hermione about it.

“I think they’ve stopped arguing,” Hermione said, trying to change the subject. “Shall we go down and help your Mum with dinner?”

Following them downstairs, I was beaming. Never before had I felt like part of the group. Ron and the others were so used to my

presence now that they felt they could talk freely. They had to remind themselves that there were things that they didn't want me to know or be a part of. If only they would include me in their conversations now that they felt I was part of the group.

When Hermione and I walked towards the garden, I glanced over at her and grinned.

"You know about Sirius then, I suspect?" Hermione asked.

"Not all of it," I replied. I quickly told her how I helped Professor Lupin and how he had rambled on about the night's events. "Of course, we all know Sirius escaped. Any idea how that happened, Hermione?" She refused to answer. "I have my suspicions. I happened to catch a glimpse of a hippogriff descending from a tower with three unknown riders. Maybe you know their identities?"

Hermione shook her head. "Ginny, I can't..."

I stopped her from talking. "It's okay. The ministry isn't too keen on forgiving those who aid wanted criminals. The less who know, the better."

"If you tell Harry what you know, maybe..."

"Harry will tell me things if he wants to tell me," I replied.

Hermione nodded. Her brown eyes gave me an admiring look. "You're more like him than you know."

I was about to respond, but I heard my older brothers in the garden laughing.

"Prepare to duel, coward!" Bill called spiritedly. He gave a whoop in a completely humorous way.

"Coward, you call me?" Charlie yelled. "Who's the one spending all their time handling dragons, brother?" He whipped out his wand.

“What are they doing?” Hermione questioned, her voice full of fear. She stayed near the edge of the garden and refused to come closer with me.

I rolled my eyes. “Being Bill and Charlie.” Those two never missed an opportunity to be better at something than the other one. Mum told me a story of when they were younger, always fighting for a spot on her lap. If one gave up and went to find Dad’s lap, the other would follow and fight for it. Despite their competitive nature, they’re the best of friends.

Bill whipped out his wand. “At least you can restrain dragons. Ever tried negotiating with a goblin?” He pointed his wand at one of the tables on the lawn and it lifted into the air. “Choose your weapon, Charles!”

Charlie pointed his wand at the other table that occupied the lawn and it rose into the air. “Don’t call me Charles, William!” he mocked.

The two tables collided in midair and made this horribly loud bang. I laughed. It was nice to have the whole family around the house for once.

Fred and George cheered them on. “A galleon on Bill,” Fred whispered to George.

“Charlie’s got this one,” George replied. “You’re on.”

I hadn’t noticed that Harry and Ron had joined us until Percy interrupted our fun. When everything was set back to normal and the tables were set, we enjoyed our dinner as a family.

We listened to Percy ramble on about Mr. Crouch and then he mentioned that “top-secret project” that the ministry was working on again. So far, none of us had humored Percy by asking him what he was talking about. It had bothered me that so many people in our house knew about it, yet I was completely uninformed. Now that Bill and Charlie were home, I’d have to question them. Maybe they could tell me

After dinner, I waited until Charlie was alone. He was outside at our Quidditch pitch, gliding around on his broom gracefully. As I watched him fly, it was easy to tell how he had been captain of the Gryffindors and how he had led them to so many victories and championship wins.

Stepping onto the field, I smiled at him as he came to a stop in front of me. "Fancy a fly, Ginny?" He pointed towards the sideline where one of our brooms was sitting. "I figured you'd be out to find me tonight."

I smiled. "I can't resist a fly with my favorite brother."

"I bet you say that to all of us."

"Yeah," I admitted. "And you all believe me."

He handed his wand to me. "Try the summoning charm," he suggested.

We wouldn't be learning how to summon until fourth year and I was about to tell Charlie that I had never even tried so before, but he grinned. He knew this, but then again, he always had more confidence in me than I had in myself. I pointed the wand and shouted with force, "*Accio broom!*"

I didn't exactly summon the broom. It was more like I had requested nicely that it come to me but the broom was reluctant to leave its position. It dragged on the ground towards me. I frowned and handed Charlie back his wand.

"For the first time, not too bad," Charlie replied.

I picked up the broom and mounted it. Gripping the wooden handle, I felt myself rise. I maneuvered it and flew three circles around my brother. The cool wind felt amazing on my skin and I could have done this all night. I stopped in front of Charlie and his eyes stared at me in admiration.

"Do you remember how you used to break into the shed to fly our brooms?" Charlie asked me.

I nodded. The first time that had happened was when I was six. “Do you remember how you and Bill eventually just let the shed unlocked for me?”

Charlie nodded. “Race me to the end and back?”

“Go!” I shouted before I gave him an answer.

I heard the word *cheater* as I sped off towards the other end. The wind whipped around me. My hair streaked behind me. I could feel Charlie shortening the distance even though I couldn’t see him. When I made my turnaround, Charlie had already caught up with me. We rocketed from the opposing side and were neck and neck. He pulled ahead, then I pulled ahead, and then back to him again. Closer to the finish line, and I knew I wasn’t able to gain on him. He crossed the boundary and did a 360° spin in celebration.

“I never could beat you,” I said breathlessly. “Even *with* cheating.”

“You’re becoming quite the flyer,” he complimented. “You should try out the school team. Maybe you could follow in my footsteps and be the Seeker?”

“Gryffindor already has the best Seeker in the school,” I casually remarked, although the idea of being on the team put many happy thoughts in my head. I had always loved to fly and being on the team with Harry... *enough said*.

“I *have* heard that our houseguest is a great Seeker,” Charlie said.

I couldn’t help but nod excitedly. “I don’t know if great is the right word to use,” I responded. “If it wasn’t for injuries and other...” I cringed when I remembered why Harry’s second year Quidditch games were cancelled. “...other things, Gryffindor would have won three years in a row instead of just last year, but we have another shot again this year. As long as Harry stays healthy, I bet the Cup will be ours again.” For goodness sake, when I started singing Harry’s praises, I couldn’t stop myself.

Charlie gazed at me in fascination, trying to figure out the next thing to say. He smiled knowingly. "You think a lot of him, don't you, Ginny?"

Trying to cover up the obvious, I said, "Doesn't everyone?"

Deciding not to press the issue, he shrugged. "I don't think Gryffindor will be winning any Quidditch championships this year."

"What?" I asked. At first I thought he might have been teasing me, but he was being completely serious. Normally, Bill and Charlie don't annoy me, but this was floating dangerously close to aggravation. "Why do you say that?" I asked.

"Sorry, Gin. I should have said that none of the houses will be winning the championship," Charlie replied. "Quidditch will be cancelled for... uh... other activities."

Other activities, I wondered to myself. What could possibly be going on that we needed to cancel Quidditch? Dumbledore knew how much the students loved playing and watching and cheering for their house of choice. *I wonder...* "Does this have anything to do with that thing Percy has been hinting at?"

"Perhaps," Charlie stated.

I was always talented at extracting information from my brothers. I knew exactly how to find out what I wanted. With Percy, you act like you don't care. With the twins, you take the direct approach and they'll let you in if they feel you are trust-worthy. With Ron, you distract him with food. With Bill, and especially Charlie, you have to ignore the information you want and spend time with them, subtly leading the conversation in a direction that seems appropriate. Don't think though that I was pretending to have fun in Charlie's company. Any time with him is enjoyable.

"Well," I said, waiting for him to be more specific.

"I'd be surprised if you didn't know already," Charlie retorted, staring at me curiously. "You *don't* know, do you? Ginny Weasley, this must be driving you bonkers."

"It is," I admitted, lowering to the ground and dismounting my broom. I placed it on the grass and sat down next to it. "I won't humor Percy if I can help it. He's got a big enough head as it is already."

Charlie chuckled. "That he does." He floated downwards and stepped carefully on the ground. "I really shouldn't be telling you..." and I flashed my look that I knew could melt his heart, like I had been doing for years. As he too sat on the cool grass, he continued, "...But if you promise..."

"I do."

"...I can't give you all the details..."

"That's fine."

"...no one else can know. If it gets back to the wrong people that I told you..."

"It won't."

Charlie inhaled deeply. I had him. He knew that I could be trusted. I found out years ago that Charlie was engaged to some witch from Romania and I told no one about it. In fact, Charlie had sought my counsel when the whole thing broke apart. No one else knew why he still had not found a suitable partner, thinking he just liked the life of a bachelor. I had proved trustworthy with that situation and he would trust me with this.

"The Triwizard Tournament," he said finally, his eyes blazing with excitement. "It's a contest that tests strength, wit, and magical fortitude. There hasn't been one in decades." He looked as if he wanted to keep talking about it, but he held back. "That's all, Ginny. I'm not saying anymore."

"Oh come on," I pleaded, placing both my hands on the ground. "Ow!" I shouted. As I pulled my hand back, a garden gnome swore at me and started walking away.

Charlie laughed. "Ever use the *Stupefy* charm?" he asked, pulling his wand from his pocket.

"That's not for several more years," I replied, taking the offered wand. I frowned, contemplating the distance between me and the gnome. Taking careful aim, I shouted the incantation.

The gnome stumbled, but did not fall. He swore again and dived inside a hole.

Charlie laughed. "Not a complete failure," he teased. He tugged on my sleeve and said, "Let's get inside. You've got an early day tomorrow."

The sun had set long before that moment. A few stars were peaking through the dimming sky. He and I walked back to the house. As we neared the house, he stopped and smiled.

"You know," he said thoughtfully, "when you came out here with me, I knew what you wanted. I promised myself I wouldn't tell you anything."

"And yet you caved in and did anyhow."

"I never could resist the Ginny charm," Charlie grinned.

He playfully shoved me. I shoved him back. He then picked me up and swung me over his shoulder. I never stopped laughing until we were safely in the kitchen. As he set me down, I wrapped my arms around his neck, gave him a goodnight kiss on the cheek, and ran up the stairs.

The Quidditch World Cup... Thousands of wizards from across the globe came out for this event. Thousands of wizards packed into one place owned by Muggles, trying to act like Muggles, and most of the time just failing miserably.

Being in the financial situation we were in, Dad could never afford to take us to Quidditch games. Harry would have taken me in a heartbeat when we were dating if so many other things hadn't been on his mind. I was seriously glad that Dad had a favor due from Ludo Bagman.

Once all the tents and camp were set up, Ron and Harry stepped into the tent that Hermione and I were staying in. Harry glanced around upon entering, amazed. It was cute the way he was still impressed with the magic around him.

"It's a bit smaller than yours," I said to the boys. Before they came in, I was reading my copy of *Quidditch Through the Ages*, trying to catch up on all the ways someone can be fouled in a match, which are a lot. I placed the book down and said, "But we are only two while you guys are eight."

"Do you need to pack so much?" Ron questioned, looking at the several outfits that Hermione and I had hanging on a rack. "We are only staying for one night."

Hermione shrugged and threw me a coy grin. "One can never be too prepared. Who knows what will happen?"

"At least it doesn't smell like cats," Harry stated.

"I'm sure I can get Mr. Weasley to conjure an extra bed if you detest the aroma of felines so much," Hermione said casually, and I caught her eye quick enough see what she was doing. I turned a light shade of pink to think that Harry might stay in the same room as me.

"We won't be sleeping much, Harry, not after tonight's game," Ron said excitably and ruining my vision of Harry and me staying up all night and talking into the wee hours of the morning.

Harry agreed, his green eyes blazing with the thought of professional Quidditch game only hours away. "Hermione, Mr. Weasley wanted us three to get water for the camp."

Figures, I thought. Once again, I was to be left out of even the minutest adventure. Gathering up a bit of courage, I offered my services.

"Dad wants you to help with the fire wood," Ron said with a face of disgust. "I still don't know why we can't just use magic. Who's really going to notice?"

“Ron,” Hermione started, “thousands of wizards cannot use magic with so many Muggles around. We have to blend in.”

I followed the three out of our tent. I felt annoyed with my father even though he didn’t realize how much I wanted to be involved with the Trio. Summer when Harry and Hermione visited was my golden opportunity to place myself in their group and eventually make it so that without me, they were lost.

Watching them walk away, I kicked a metal can on the ground and it hit the tent beside ours. I heard a yelp inside and the tent flap popped open. I recognized the boy as Zacharias Smith, a Chaser recruited for the Hufflepuff team last year. He was in my year and despite the fact that he was a Hufflepuff, I think the Sorting Hat made a mistake. He was an obnoxious kid who would be more at home in Slytherin.

“Ginny Weasley?” he shouted at me. His look of anger turned to a look of amusement. “I thought it was some mangy kids.”

“Hello, Zacharias,” I said flatly.

“I am surprised to see you here,” Zacharias said.

I couldn’t tell if he was being rude about my less-than-affluent family or something different. If he was Draco Malfoy or Julius Harper, I’d be able to figure that out right away. “What do you mean by that?”

Zacharias shrugged. “You never struck me as a Quidditch loving dame. I see you more as...” he paused, grinning. “...a girl who likes to play with dolls...”

Was he trying to flirt with me? That grin looked like he was trying to tease me in a friendly manner. If he was, he was doing a lousy job at it. Everything he was saying sounded like he was being rude. I was beginning to see that he had a talent for quickly and efficiently getting under my skin. Annoyed, I said, “I’ve been flying since I was six.”

“Have you been lying that long, too?”

“Lying?” I spat the words out with disgust. I hate to be called a liar when I wasn’t one. I loathe it with a passion. Without thinking, my hand gripped my wand but I didn’t pull it out. “Why would I lie to you?”

He was still grinning as if he was successfully capturing my interest. “Trying to make a good impression, maybe.”

“Zacharias, I could fly circles around you twenty times before you even realize I was there!” I shouted. My eyes flashed at him, daring him to prove me wrong, and I felt the anger stewing inside. I gripped my wand harder but dared not pull it out.

A flame suddenly burst from a log sitting beside Zacharias. He ignored it. “Is that so?” he scoffed. “Yet I’m on the house Quidditch team and you’re not.”

He did have a point. He also was an idiot. It wasn’t as if Gryffindor needed anyone else since their team was near perfection. I still think it would have been a good idea to have back-up players, then I might have tried out if I wasn’t so preoccupied with setting my life back in order. I might have even tried out for Keeper this year if I knew it wasn’t going to be cancelled. Zacharias didn’t need to know that. “Trust me, Smith, you’ll never see me on the team...”

He nodded. “Like I thought-”

“...because I’ll be blazing right past you.” I turned to leave, whipping my red hair around fast. I heard Zacharias ask me if I wanted to take a walk around the camp area. So he did think he was flirting with me. Stopping, I finally noticed Fred and George off to the side watching us.

“Our sister would like nothing to do with you,” Fred called.

“We would suggest you return to your tent,” George said.

“And if you don’t agree, you’ll have more than just me and George here to deal with,” Fred motioned to the tent. “Did you know that Ginny has six older brothers, a father, and a certain Boy-Who-Lived here with her tonight?” I grinned, knowing that three of our brothers hadn’t even arrived yet.

Zacharias backed up. "Hey," he said. "No harm done." He flashed a smile at me and stepped back into his tent. I could have thrown up.

"I was handling that quite well on my own but thanks for your assistance anyhow," I said to the twins.

"Was that Smith?" George asked.

"Yes," I replied. "He thought that by insulting me, I might fancy him. What a git. Maybe we can drop a toffee in his tent."

Fred and George looked proud of me. They could see that I had inherited their love for mischief. I was a nice combination of my family. I had taken after Charlie with my ability to fly. I had the twins' knack for tomfoolery. I had Mum's temper but Dad's ability to control it... at least most of the time.

Fred pointed to the log that was set afire during our argument. "That's an impressive piece of magic you did there."

"Wandless and nonverbal," George counted them off.

"I did that?"

"I remember when I was your age," Fred said, "I set fire to Mum's favorite rose bush because I angry with her. Didn't even lift the wand."

"It's true," George confirmed. "I was there." He placed a hand in my hair and ruffled my red locks. "Come to think of, I remember a particular little witch who forced Mum to replace three burnt teddy bears because she wasn't getting her bottle."

I crinkled my face. "I wasn't that bad, was I?"

Fred and George simply exchanged glances and shrugged. They were right though, in saying that wizards can't always control their magic. Look at Harry unintentionally inflating his Aunt. Was it really strange that I had just set fire to a log? Perhaps this matched the fiery personality that Harry would eventually love about me.

I walked with the twins for the firewood. We traveled through a sea of tents, talking about the coming game and who Fred and George had seen already. We passed by a sullen looking family and I recognized Harper. Vaisey couldn't be too far away. We passed by a strange looking tent, which ended up being the Lovegood camp. I tried to get Luna's attention but she was too busy hanging paprika plants. I saw Cho Chang walking with a Ravenclaw friend and I felt my insides clench.

When we returned to camp with armfuls of wood, the Golden Trio still hadn't returned. Dad looked pleased and, after consulting a handbook on Muggle camping, stacked the wood in the appropriate shape.

"Where are those matches?" Dad asked George.

"Matches?" Fred muttered to me. "All he has to do is make *you* angry."

We offered to help, but Dad declined, fascinated by the small sticks that supposedly created fire. I'm glad he was the one doing it because the show was entertaining. When the Trio returned moments later, they also got a kick out of Dad's futile attempts.

After lunch, Dad pointed out important Ministry workers to Harry and Hermione. The rest of us were already informed and we could care less. I played Ron in a game of Wizard's Chess and almost beat him. By the time we were done, Charlie, Bill, and Percy had arrived. Soon after that, we met Ludo Bagman and Barty Crouch. Crouch, to the twins' delight, didn't even know Percy's name. Bagman made a bet with the twins about the game.

When Ludo Bagman does someone a favor, he really delivers. I marveled at the top-box seating he provided for us. We could see *everything*. If only he could have kept the Malfoys out of there, it would have been perfect.

After the mascots, the match started. It was fast paced and intense. It was clear that Charlie was right. Ireland was the better team, but the real star of the game was definitely Viktor Krum. He was amazing. I glanced over at Harry who intently studied the match through his

omnioculars. He looked awe-struck and I could almost see him adding Krum's moves to his own repertoire of tricks to practice later.

I glanced at Hermione, who for a second had a goofy look on her face. She caught my eye and immediately regained her composure. This was unlike her. She was never into Quidditch this much. She barely knew the positions. When we cheered for our house teams, more often than not, she was skimming through some book.

The twins ended up being right. Krum did catch the Snitch, but his team lost by ten points. It was an admirable thing to do, I decided. Ireland was far too good and Krum refused to lose by such a large difference.

When the match ended, I figured out what Hermione's goofy look meant. "He was really brave, wasn't he?" she said as she leaned forward to catch another glimpse of Krum. I couldn't help but smirk. Hermione was star struck. She had a crush on Viktor Krum. "He looks a terrible mess..." I was eager to get Hermione alone in order to confirm my suspicions.

I fell asleep far too early when we were in the boys' tents celebrating. Harry and I shared a few excited replays of the match and soon after, I was napping. Dad woke me up to send me back to my tent since I had just spilled hot chocolate all over the floor. Hermione followed.

Yawning as we entered the tent, I strolled over to my bed and flopped down on it. Hermione did the same. After a moment, I sat up and tossed a pillow at her. "That Krum, he's quite a player, don't you think?"

Hermione, who ignored the pillow toss, sat up, her eyes sparkling. "He makes Quidditch exciting and he's only 18. That's only three years older than me."

"You're 14."

"Almost 15."

I rolled my eyes. "Hermione, if I didn't know any better, I'd say you fancy Krum." I watched her face carefully.

"Well... no..." she faltered. "He *is* brave... and he *is* handsome... but he's... no...."

As I thought. Hermione had a crush on an international Quidditch star. I'm sure she wasn't the only one. Besides, there was no harm done to my dream of her being my sister-in-law. It's not like she would ever meet Viktor Krum, right? Little did I know that Krum had already been scheduled to come with Durmstrang and eventually compete in the Triwizard Tournament.

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I was in the Chamber of Secrets.

I wore a black robe with snakes crawling over my shoulders.

"Ginny..." the snake hissed. "Do you remember opening the Chamber?"

"It wasn't my fault!" I screamed back at the snake. "It was Tom. I didn't do it!"

"Liessss!" the snake replied. "Tom only assisted in what you really wanted to do. You wanted to hurt them. You want to kill the Mudbloods."

"NO"

"Come back to us. There are more of us waiting for you!"

I looked into a pool of red liquid and I saw my reflection. My hair was completely gone, shaven to the skin. My eyes glowed a fierce, dark yellow color. I threw my head back and laughed, looking at a skull I was holding in my right hand. My tongue slipped out and back inside, revealing that it was forked like the snakes that taunted me.

--

"Ginny!"

I searched the Chamber with my yellow eyes, looking for the voice that had no body. Maybe it was Harry Potter, I thought to my evil-self, maybe I could kill him once and for all.

“GINNY!” and I was being shaken violently.

I opened my eyes and Dad was standing over me. It was a dream, a nightmare, and I had wanted to kill Harry. I was a snake. I pushed Dad away from me and grabbed the hand mirror beside the bed. I looked at my reflection. It was normal, red hair intact, eyes still the brown I recognized, no forked tongue... No skull in my right hand...

“Ginny! Get up! We have to leave!” Dad said.

The nightmare had its lasting effects. I ran disorientated with the twins, Ron, Harry, and Hermione. Looking back, I saw them, the Death Eaters in their robes and masks, and above them, a family of Muggles being tossed around while their attackers laughed cruelly. Dad and my older brothers left to stop them.

The atmosphere was one of pandemonium. People screamed in horror. Tents were on fire. I saw a little boy crying by himself. We followed the mob as they ran into the wooded area. Somewhere beneath the canopy of trees, we lost the Golden Trio.

“Fred! Stop! We have to go back!” I shouted.

“What? Why?”

“Ron and Harry and Hermione... where are they?”

“You know they can take care of themselves,” Fred cried. “My number one priority is keeping you safe!” I had never heard Fred talk so brave before.

“Then come with me!” I snarled, trying to wrench my hand away from his.

“Ginny, stop!” George said loudly.

We heard a shrill laughter above us. Looking skyward, I spotted Harper and Vaisey sitting on a thick branch of the tree we stood beneath. They were peering through their own set of omnioculars towards the mayhem with the Death Eaters. Harper tapped Vaisey on the shoulder and told him to check something out in slow motion.

My anger boiled up inside again. With a scowl on my face, I screamed at them, "What the HELL do you think you're doing?"

Harper and Vaisey stared down at me, utterly amused by the scene. They maneuvered their way off the branch and jumped down beside us.

Fred stepped between me and the boys. "Don't touch her," he said with such force.

Harper slapped Fred on the back with glee. "Why would we bother with her when we have better entertainment?" He pointed towards the camp grounds and the floating Muggles.

Fred and George stepped closer to them, looks of fury flashing in their eyes.

"You find this amusing?" George whispered harshly. "Torturing innocent people?"

"The only after-party activities that are worth it," Vaisey replied smugly.

My disgust and contempt for these two were always present, but the fact that they could *laugh* at this made me furious. For the second time that night, I grasped my wand in anger.

The Slytherins laughed. "Keep your wand to yourself, little Weasley," said Harper, as he and Vaisey went fast for their own wands.

My brothers went for their wands. Before they could reach them, I pushed them out of the way and pointed my own wand at them. "*Stupefy!*" I shouted. A jet of red light flowed from my wand and caught both Slytherins in the shoulders. They soared backwards and

violently slammed into the tree they had descended from. Slumping against the trunk, they collapsed into a heap.

"Size isn't everything," I hissed.

Fred and George looked astounded at me and then at the two unconscious bodies. Whistling, they pat me on the shoulder.

"You're full of surprises today, aren't you?" George questioned.

"Where did you learn that one?" Fred asked.

Panting, I wiped a bead of sweat from my brow. "Charlie," I said, grinning.

"How long have you been using that?" George questioned.

"That was the second time," I replied. I suddenly remembered what we had been worried about. "They're still out there," I said to Fred and George.

"Dad asked us to keep *you* safe," George said slowly. "He told us to hide. If we got separated, we were supposed to keep you out of danger until things cleared."

I had taken out all my anger on Vaisey and Harper. I didn't want to fight with my brothers anymore. I asked them to lead the way and I would follow. As we left, I glanced back at the heap and knew I'd probably pay for that the next time we crossed paths. I promised them silently that I'd be ready.

Sneaking around through the woods, I could tell that Fred and George were just as worried to have lost Ron and the other two, but they didn't want to frighten me. As we walked, I looked for any signs of the Trio, but with each step of failure to locate them, the more worried I became.

The woods suddenly filled with a green glow and we heard hundreds of people screaming in terror. Coming into a clearing, I looked up and saw the strangest and most frightening thing. Against the blackness

of the sky, a green skull stared down at everyone. Wrapping within the skull, a snake of the same color twisted manically.

Fred and George both swore, grabbed my hand, and pulled me behind a large log and shrubbery. I had never seen *this* look in their eyes. I grabbed at their robes and said, "What does that mean? Why...?"

Fred shook his head. "It hasn't been seen in 12 years..."

"Thirteen," George corrected and Fred agreed.

"*What is it?*" I hissed.

"His mark," they said in unison.

"Who's mark...?" I gasped as I realized who they were talking about. "You-Know-Who....? His mark...? *Is he back?*" I gulped. That idea seemed ludicrous. Voldemort couldn't have returned. He was defeated and weak. Harry had made sure of that. "It's just... flashy lights... Why are you so scared?"

"You're not old enough to remember," Fred said softly. "George and I were three the last time it was used, but we were two when we saw it for the first time... it's our first clear memory..."

"...Mum was taking us to visit her brothers Gideon and Fabian..." George continued.

"They were twins, too. They fought against You-Know-Who... both funny blokes... great practical jokers... We inherited their zest for mischief and comedy... we got our first trick wand from them... turned into a dancing rubber chicken... made us laugh for days..." Fred added.

"We saw it a mile away," George shuddered at the memory. "I saw it first and I thought it was a game. Told Mum '*look at the pretty lights.*' I didn't understand why she started to cry..."

"She kept repeating '*please not my brothers... not Gideon and Fabian...*'"

“But the closer we got, there was no doubt that it was over their house...”

Tears were cascading down my cheeks. I embraced my brothers, one arm around each of their necks. I understood now what the mark meant. It meant that somebody had been murdered. It must have been terrifying coming home to something like that. I imagined for a second that I would arrive back from the Burrow to fight the skull and snake staring down at me and having to discover who had been killed inside.

My eyes flashed up to the mark hanging in the sky. I wondered who had been murdered tonight. Was it Harry? Did the Death Eaters finally have their revenge on him? Was it Ron? Was it Hermione? Was it someone's child who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time?

We didn't say anything for the remainder of the time that we stayed hidden. No words were needed in that kind of situation. Fred and George just held me close and we hoped for everyone's safety. It was then that I knew that Fred and George were not only humorous additions to our family but brave and loyal and full of emotion.

Things finally settled down and we made our way back to the tents. When the Trio arrived, we learned that they had been right in the center of all the controversy. Of course they were! I find it hard to fathom that no one understood their destiny until the final defeat of Voldemort.

No one had been killed. I scanned the twins' faces and saw that they were just as relieved as I was. Dad and the other Ministry members assumed it was someone's idea of a bad joke or a way to scare off the Death Eaters who feared Voldemort's punishing hand.

Of course, when we arrived back at the Burrow, Mum made the largest fuss ever over all of us. I suspect that the clock in the kitchen had pointed all of our fates near mortal peril simultaneously. Handy little thing but very misleading. I doubt that any of us had *really* been in mortal peril.

We spent much of the week anticipating news from the Ministry. Percy and Dad kept us up to date on the latest information. Apparently everything was in an uproar. Rita Skeeter of *The Daily Prophet* didn't help the situation either. None of her stories told anything about the bravery and immediate action of Ministry officials.

On the last day of the holiday, Hermione had gone into a rampage concerning her new-found civil rights attitude. While making sure we had packed everything, she wouldn't shut up.

"And to free Winky like that... I can't believe Crouch would do such a thing!"

I rolled my eyes. "I thought you wanted them free?"

Hermione opened her school bag and made sure she had packed all her clothes. "I want them to be *paid* for their labor."

I stacked all my schoolbooks in a pile and then packed them into my trunk. "Maybe Ron's right. Maybe they like to be slaves."

"Only because they have been brainwashed!" Hermione said in a huff. She grabbed a stack of parchment and an ink bottle and stuffed them into her bag. "When we get to Hogwarts, I think we should do something about it."

"We?" I repeated. I honestly didn't want anything to do with it. I wasn't inside a house-elf's mind and I didn't know how they ticked. I didn't have time to worry about such things. I glanced at Hermione's face. She was about to be annoyed that I didn't share her "Liberate the House-Elf" mentality.

Luckily Mum interrupted us. She laid our freshly cleaned Hogwarts robes on the beds. "Here you are, Ginny. Here you are, Hermione."

"Thanks, Mrs. Weasley," Hermione said glumly.

"Are you still worried about house-elves, my dear?" Mum asked her as she shifted the remainder of the robes from one arm to the other. "Such things shouldn't be your mind. It's noble, of course, but you should be worried about schoolwork and boys."

“...like a certain Bulgarian Seeker...?” I muttered to Hermione and she shot me a look of embarrassment and loathing. I suppressed a giggle. Eager to change the subject so Mum wouldn’t have to listen to Hermione’s *noble* gestures, I caught a glimpse of a lacy fabric between the big piles of robes. “Mum, you know how much I don’t like wearing dresses.”

Mum looked at me questioningly and I pointed the fabric out to her. “That’s not a dress, Ginny,” she stated. “They’re dress-robos for Ron.”

“Ron?” Hermione and I both shouted.

“Well, yes. I had to buy them second-hand, of course,” Mum said, but couldn’t hide the amusement in her voice. “They were on your school lists,” she said to Hermione.

“Why are we dressing up?” Hermione asked.

“I imagine that...” she stopped before she revealed the details of the Triwizard events. “...well, you usually dress up at school for one reason... a dance...”

“A dance?” I repeated, excited.

“I’m sorry, but they weren’t on your list,” Mum said, obviously as disappointed as I looked. “But I’m sure that if a certain...” She grinned mischievously and looked upwards towards the boys room “...older wizard asks you go, you would be allowed.” She hummed to herself as she went to the doors. “Excuse me, girls. I have to take the boys their things.”

When I looked at Hermione, she looked a bit worried. I sensed that she was hoping Ron would notice in time for the dance that their anatomies were not exactly the same. To take her mind off such thoughts, I grabbed her hand and led her out the door.

“What are you doing, Ginny?”

“Mum’s giving Ron his dress robes and I don’t want to miss his reaction,” I said but I stopped on the flight of stairs. “Unless you’re against eaves-dropping.”

I couldn’t picture Hermione standing outside a door, trying to sift through voices and extract the information she wanted, but this was just eaves-dropping for fun. “Well,” Hermione replied. “It’s not our fault that we listen better when no one thinks we are.”

Laughing in triumph, I led her up the stairwell, tiptoeing on each step. Unfortunately, the boys had not yet returned to their room at that moment, but we did listen to the conversation later to great amusement.

When it came time for the Hogwarts Express to leave, I hurried off this time without the Trio to find a friend I had not talked to since before the summer. I’m sure the Trio didn’t miss me. They were probably already working on their plans to hunt down all the Death Eaters at the Quidditch World Cup.

“Hello, Ginny!” called a familiar voice. Neville stood in the corridors before the train left. He waved at me and smiled.

“Good morning, Neville,” I greeted. He looked happy to be on his way back to Hogwarts. As much as that kid loved his grandmother, she could be quite a lot to handle. “How was the summer for you?”

Neville didn’t look too enthusiastic. “Uneventful,” he said glumly. “Gran did buy me this.” He pulled a glass top from his pocket. It was a Sneakoscope. “She says that with all the events in the last three years at Hogwarts, I could really use it.” Neville made a face at it. “But Ron told me they never work right.” He held it out to me. “Do you want it?”

I took the Sneakoscope. I shrugged. “I suppose I could take it off your hands,” I replied. I slipped it into my pocket.

“How about your summer, Ginny?”

I thought back over the last two months. My best friend had stayed with us. The object of my affection had slept under the same roof. I

named an Owl. Fred and George trusted me with their business secrets. The Quidditch World Cup. Though I did have an interesting summer, I decided to go with a modest answer. "Same."

Neville didn't agree. "You got to the World Cup. It couldn't have been too uneventful."

"If I had known how that was going to end, I would have gladly given you my ticket," I replied. Looking down the corridor, I saw Delia wave to me. I waved back.

"I'm going to look for Harry," Neville said. He patted me on the shoulder as he passed by and traveled towards the other train cars.

I heard a squeal and the patter of feet. When I turned towards the sound, someone had slammed into me and almost flattened my body. It was Delia. She wrapped her arms around me and squeezed. Chattering away, she led me to a compartment, packed my bags into the overhead, and sat across from me.

"I missed you!" Delia said. I liked Delia but she was hyper and I could only handle her in small doses. Since she was Muggleborn, she was always chattering away about Muggle celebrities and Muggle *television* programs and this and that. She might have been a Gryffindor, but her idea of bravery would be painting her toenails a different color than her fingernails.

"I missed you, too." It wasn't a lie. I *did* miss her. It was just that now that I was *done* missing her, I was ready to *start* missing her again. Small doses, remember?

"Look at you!" Delia gazed at me. She glanced down at my chest and I blushed. Leave it up to Delia to notice such things. "You look beautiful."

I didn't say anything. The truth was that I *had* noticed the change in my body over the summer. My face, for one thing, was beginning to lose that childish look. My freckles were no longer dominating my cheeks, but fading away to add a nice bit of flavor to my smooth skin. My hair had always been beautiful but lately, it was lying perfectly around my shoulders. Not to mention that I had, *ahem*, acquired

certain womanly attributes. I would never have said it back then, but in hindsight, I was a looker.

Too bad it took Harry a little bit longer to notice.

"I bet your summer was great," Delia said. "Am I right in saying that Ron had Harry Potter over?"

It was never just *Harry*, always *Harry Potter* with her. And did I mention she was boy crazy? Obsessed with the opposite sex. She always wanted to talk about boys. Harry Potter... Dean Thomas... even Draco Malfoy... *Ginny, he might be a total jerk, but you have to admit that he's cute...*

"Harry spent the night before he went with us to the Quidditch World Cup," I replied. I started to go into a retelling of the amazing battle of Ireland versus Bulgaria, but Delia cut me off.

"Did you talk to him?"

I blinked a few times and gave her a blank stare. "Of course I talked to him. He's best friends with my brother." I was not interested in talking about Harry so I continued to talk about the match again.

"What did he say?"

"What did who...?" I asked dumbfounded. Like I said, small doses. I grabbed Delia by the hand and held it close. "Delia, you know I love you, but knock it off. There's nothing to talk about. He's only a friend." I let go of her hand.

"I'm jealous of you, staying under the same roof with a famous person."

I shook my head. "To tell you the truth, it's rather..."

There were several things I wanted to express. My initial reaction was to tell her that it was amazing, because that's really how it was. Amazing because I was actually able to function normally around Harry this summer. Amazing because we exchanged some Quidditch World Cup replays with each other. My next reaction was to tell her

that I wasn't infatuated with Harry anymore, and that was almost the truth. I knew my feelings for Harry were no longer a schoolgirl crush, but rather maturing and developing into something far deeper than what I felt before. What exactly that was, I wasn't sure yet.

But I didn't want to discuss these issues any further with Delia. She would make me pick apart every single little detail of my interaction with Harry.

Ending my quick pause, I finished with, "...dull."

Delia laughed it off. "Whatever."

"What did you do this summer?" I asked, quickly trying to change the subject. Luckily she had a good summer. She basically didn't stop talking about her summer boyfriends and her trip to America and rock climbing and fashion. I was able to get through the conversation with minimal words. I grinned, not sure how I was going to be able to keep this girl to small doses when I was her roommate this term.

She didn't stop talking all the way from the Hogsmeade station and into the Great Hall. She only ceased when the Sorting began. When the first person was Sorted into Ravenclaw, I noticed Harry gawking absentmindedly towards their table. Following his gaze, I located its destination point: Cho Chang... for a fleeting second, I wanted to join the Ravenclaw table, too... so I could strangle the oh-so-pretty fifth year.

After dinner, Dumbledore properly greeted us, introduced the new DADA teacher, and explained the Triwizard Tournament.

And the new term had officially begun.

Author's Note:

Before anyone reads any further and starts thinking I'm making Ginny into Super-Ginny, please consider canon. At the beginning of OotP, the twins make a comment about how powerful Ginny is despite her size. Assuming that they weren't lying, they must have witnessed

Ginny doing powerful things. That doesn't mean I'll be making our youngest Weasley do unbelievable feats of magic. This just means that she might be impressive and I don't want you to be caught off guard when it happens.

Chapter Six: A Different Kind of Hogwarts Champion

Professor "Mad-Eye" Moody. He may have been Barty Crouch, Jr. Death Eater extraordinaire; he may have been disguised as a former Auror; he may have been out to kill Harry, but he made one mistake.

He taught us.

He was so determined to fit the part of Moody that he made the mistake and taught us everything we needed to know. In fact, he was a *great* teacher. We learned a lot from him. It's hard to believe that he wasn't the real thing.

The Ravenclaw and the Gryffindor Third Years waited eagerly in the DADA class room. We had been overly excited to experience Moody's teaching for most of the week. We had heard the story of Malfoy being transfigured into a ferret. We had heard the constant vigilance rumors. We had heard that he was mental, but amazing.

Sitting next to Delia and Luna, we heard the distinct sound. *Thunk thunk thunk*. Into the door came Mad-Eye Moody. His hair was just as grisly as when we had first seen him. His wooden foot peaked out from beneath his robes.

"Put your books back into your bags," he growled, as if he had said this to every class that he taught thus far. We complied as he read off our names on the roll. Slamming the paper down on the desk again, he paced in front of the class room. He stopped in front of me. "Your Sneakoscope in your bag. Has it been whistling a lot lately?"

Could he really see inside my bag? He was right though, the little gizmo had barely stopped whistling since I stepped foot in the school. I wrapped it in tissue paper to muffle the sound and would pull it every couple hours to tinker with it. "Yes, Professor," I said.

"I suspect all the mischief in this school has something to do with it," Moody growled. "If you give it to me, I might be able to adjust it accordingly." I dug it out of my bag and handed it to him. He pointed his wand at it and the Sneakoscope disappeared.

He addressed the class now. "I have been getting complaints from parents that I shouldn't be here," Moody barked, his magical eye studying each one of us closely. "They say that I've lost my mind, that the years of fighting Dark Wizards have rattled my brain." He pounded a desk loudly and we jumped in our seats. "Codswallop! My mind is just as sharp as ever."

He limped towards the right side of the room and picked up Colin's textbook that he had not put away yet. He flipped through the pages. "The parents say that I shouldn't be teaching you about curses. The Ministry would have a nasty word to add if they knew what we were doing. They say you're too young. I say they're wrong." He slammed the book shut and handed it back to Colin.

"You-Know-Who didn't hesitate to attack because someone was not of age, so if any of you feel you are too young to be taught in this class, there's the door," Moody pointed. "You will not be punished. Dumbledore will give you different lessons to study on your own... effortless, undemanding, meaningless rubbish work!"

I scanned the room. No one stood up to leave. Moody had our full attention.

Moody continued. "That's what I thought," he said. "I have told the other classes the same as I am going to tell you. What use is a countercurse if you don't know what you're up against? A dark wizard is not going to be kind enough to give you a list of the spells and curses he may or may not use against you. You must be ready. You must be prepared."

He searched the room, looking like a snake ready to strike. "There are three Unforgivable Curses. You...!" he pointed at a Gryffindor boy behind me by the name of Ethan Taylor. "Can you give me the name of one of them?"

Ethan nodded, looking horrified. "My dad had one put on him by a Death Eater years ago," he whispered. "The torture curse... the Crusia... the Crucia..."

"The Cruciatus Curse," Moody snarled. He went to his desk and opened a jar on the table. Sticking his hand in, he pulled a spider

from it. "Nasty curse..." he muttered and pointed it at the arachnid. "*Crucio!*"

The spider immediately buckled beneath the spell. I swallowed hard as the creature writhed in Moody's hand. If it had a voice, it would have been screaming.

"Nasty curse indeed," Moody repeated. He stopped the spell and looked around. "The most powerful wizards in the world have fallen prey to this curse. If kept on long enough, I pray for their sanity." He breathed in and looked at me. "Weasley, is it?" and I nodded. "Another curse, if you will."

I had hoped he wouldn't pick me to answer. I was intimidated by him. I *did* know the next two curses. The Killing Curse was one, but I didn't want to be responsible for the death of an innocent creature, not matter how horrid it was. There was only one other option to pick. "The Imperius Curse," I said.

Moody nodded. "That's the one your brother chose." He pointed the wand at the spider. "*Imperio!*" The spider stopped moving. Almost instantly, it jumped towards the desk. And as if Moody had done this already, his face was stern. The spider had developed the talent for acrobatics and tap-dancing.

I stared at the creature but refused to laugh as my fellow classmates had started to do. I knew what the curse did. It was total control over someone. I wondered, with great trepidation, if that's what the memory of Tom Riddle had placed on me.

"What should I have it do next?" Moody asked the class. "Jump out the window? Throw itself down one of your throats? Pick up a wand and curse you with it?" No one was laughing anymore. "I hope you understand what kind of problem this curse presents."

Delia raised her hand this time and I was surprised. She spoke softly. "You can make someone kill their family and no one would ever know they were being controlled."

"Exactly," Moody said. "Many people claimed to be under the Imperius Curse after You-Know-Who's downfall. Since there is no

way to detect the curse on people, how can we call them liars? We can't!"

I raised my hand into the air this time. "Can it be performed without a wand?" I asked, thinking about how Riddle might have used the diary instead of a wand.

"I have never heard of such things," he replied, and I decided that I was going to talk to Moody later in private.

"You!" Moody pointed to Luna. "Can you tell me the last curse?"

Luna, who usually looked dreamy, appeared scared. "I don't want to," she whispered. She closed her eyes and tried to wish away the scene.

"The Killing Curse," Moody said. I watched the spider pause on the desk before swiftly climbing its jar, attempting to get back inside, as if it knew what was coming. "*Avada Kedavra!*" Moody shouted. With a flash of green light, the spider fell where it stood, motionless.

"No countercurse," Moody said. "I know of only one person to have survived it, and I met him five days ago."

My mind went to Harry. Had Moody said the same thing when the Fourth Years had this class? Had Harry felt the pain of seeing exactly how his parents died and how *he* would have died if hadn't been for a miracle?

Ethan spoke up. "Professor, if there's no countercurse, why are you showing it to us?"

"You've... got... to know...." He said, with each word coming closer to Ethan. "Constant vigilance! If you aren't prepared for the worst, you have no chance fighting at all." Moody turned around to write on the board. "I want you all to copy these notes into your pages..." He stopped writing but did not turn around. "Miss Fawcett, I hope you have enough Chocolate Frogs for the whole class."

I glanced back at Sarah and she had this bewildered look on her face. Her hands were below the desk and obviously hiding something.

When our first DADA class was over, I told Delia and Luna that I'd catch up with them later. I lingered behind and waited for the stragglers to leave the room. Tending to something with his back to me, I walked slowly towards Moody.

"Class is dismissed, Miss Weasley," Moody said, without turning around. "And I don't know if I'll have time to fix your Sneakoscope anytime soon."

"I know, Professor, but I had a question for you," I said softly. "About the Imperius Curse."

"Too personal to ask in front of the class, I suspect," Moody asked. "Is this to do with the wandless Imperius?"

"Yes," I said. I hesitated, and then I told him the quick version of my First Year, how the memory of Voldemort had controlled me. "Do you think it was the curse?"

"It would take a strong bit of magic to make something like that work," Moody said as he finally turned around. "If any wizard could do it, I would say it was You-Know-Who. But what you describe sounds more like possession. Very similar, but also logically different."

I nodded. "I just hate the idea of You-Know-Who inside me."

Moody grunted. "You say you were able to fight him off briefly?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Against the most powerful wizard of our time," Moody said, his eye scanning me. "That's impressive." He motioned for the door and walked beside me. "I suspect that you will do well when we practice fighting the Imperius Curse off."

I stopped abruptly. My bag had been open. My DADA book fell out and landed on the floor. Ignoring the fallen object, I said, "You're going to put it on us?" Learning about them was one thing. Witnessing them was another. *Having them put on us?*

"Constant vigilance," Moody repeated his infamous phrase.

He bent down clumsily and picked up my textbook. It had opened near the end. "I doubt we'll be getting this far," he growled, scanning over the page. He read the hex that was listed and that dominated the text of the page. "Bat-Bogey Hex," he muttered as he handed the book back to me. "Difficult spell to master, though I doubt it would give you much trouble at all."

As I returned to the Common Room, I flipped open to the page that he was reading. I saw an illustration of several vicious bats attacking the face of a dodgy-looking character. I read the description of the spell.

Bat-Bogey Hex

Incantation: Chiroptera

The Bat-Bogey Hex is a fun yet powerful spell. It transfigures the bogey within a target's nose into several bats. Following the transfiguration, the bats will immediately attack the target.

The Bat-Bogey Hex is a difficult spell to perform. It requires experience in transfiguration and control of the newly-formed bats with use of the Oppugno charm. Many young wizards cannot easily combine two completely different spells with the same incantation. It necessitates determination, constant practice, and strength of mind.

I closed the book and muttered the incantation under my breath. I repeated the phrase *fun yet powerful* to myself. Thinking about how my brothers always portrayed me, I decided that spell's description also described me. Moody had said that he didn't think it would give me much trouble, that he was convinced I could master such a difficult spell. I would have to practice this hex and see if his confidence in me really was justified.

After dinner, Hermione was on another SPEW recruitment process and was becoming annoyed that I didn't want to join her. When Neville fell over a stack of books, I used the distraction to slip out of the Common Room.

I took a stroll beside the lake. I liked being alone every now and then. The best company I could keep was myself sometimes. I picked up a pebble and skipped it on the lake. Where the ripple had formed, bubbles appeared. A green-skinned creature with two horns broke the surface of the water. It was a grindylow. The water creature hissed at me.

Slightly amused, I pulled my wand out and decided to try out my new spell. Pointing it at the grindylow, I shouted, "*Chiroptera!*" The grindylow looked at me curiously, hissed again, and dove beneath the surface of the water.

Disappointed, I thought maybe the hex couldn't be used on water creatures. I placed my wand back into my robes and journeyed back to Gryffindor Tower. After all, I had homework to take care of and I could always practice on a different day.

The following week, Moody announced to the rest of the class that we were going to practice throwing Imperius Curse off of us. "I've had some complaints earlier this week about my methods of teaching. I say the same that I said last week. If you'd rather learn the hard way when someone is controlling you completely, be my guest. You are excused."

None of my classmates left. One by one, Moody called my peers to experience the effects of the curse. Luna spoke in an unmistakable French accent and laughed uncontrollably. Delia flapped her wings and pretended to fly around the room. Ethan, who never could keep a beat, was able to thump a catchy rhythm on the desks. Slowly, all my classmates had participated and none of them were able to break the curse.

Finally, Moody looked at me. "Weasley, you're next." I stood up from my desk and took my place in front of the classroom. Taking a deep breath, I prepared myself. "*Imperio!*" Moody growled.

It was a pleasant feeling, nothing like what I had experienced with Riddle. With the diary, I had felt lost, miserable, and not myself. With this curse, I felt free, more myself than I had ever before, and (dare I say it?) happy. I didn't need to worry anymore. Someone else was in charge and I was fine with that.

Spin around, Weasley, I heard Moody's voice. That sounded like such a brilliant idea. I couldn't figure out why I didn't think of it. I made a complete turn and I heard Moody tell me to continue spinning.

And then I heard my own voice inside my head. *Won't I get dizzy? I can't do that. This is silly. I think I'd rather stay still.* But I spun around anyhow.

Spin again, Weasley.

You listened to Riddle,

I said spin again, Weasley.

No. I won't be controlled again. No no no no

SPIN AGAIN, WEASLEY!

Isn't that what Riddle would do? Didn't he command you? I thought. *He made you hurt your friends.*

When Moody finally let me out of the curse, it took everything inside of me to keep myself from weeping. It felt too much like the diary. I wanted to curl up and not speak with anyone. Moody dismissed the class and told me to wait.

"Are you okay, Miss Weasley?" he asked.

"Fine," I muttered, gathering up my belongings.

"Mind, it's not shameful to not be able to break the curse," he said.

"You thought I could do it," I replied.

"I still do," Moody said. "Give it time. You were almost there today."

I grunted, annoyed with myself that I had failed where I was hoping I would succeed. Harry had been the only one in the school so far to be able to break free of the curse on the first try. I suppose it was foolish of me to think I could have accomplished the same thing.

On October 30th, both foreign schools arrived at Hogwarts. When the Durmstrang lot stepped out into our view, I heard Ron exclaim, "Harry! It's Krum!"

I was standing with Delia a few rows behind the Trio. Delia was ignorant when it came to most of the Wizarding World's famous people, but even she recognized the international Quidditch player. "I don't have a quill," she hissed.

I rolled my eyes. I glanced over at Hermione. She was trying her best not to look excited. "For heaven's sake, Ron. He's only a Quidditch player!" she said. I smirked because I knew she was covering up her own admiration.

As we followed the school into our Great Hall, I heard several Sixth Years trying to locate their lipstick. Delia heard them. "Do you think he *would* sign if I had lipstick?" she frantically searched through her pockets. I rolled my eyes. Did she not realize that Krum would be here all year?

Dumbledore explained that the Goblet of Fire would be the impartial judge that would pick each school's champion and that there would be an age restriction, much to many students' dismay, my brothers included. When the feast was over, the tournament officially began.

The following evening, on Halloween night, the Goblet of Fire chose the champions. No one was surprised that Viktor Krum was the champion for Durmstrang. The boys were pleasantly pleased that Fleur Delacour was the Beauxbatons champion. The Hogwarts student body held their breath when it came our turn.

It chose Cedric Diggory. Despite that he lived so close to me and took the Portkey to the World Cup with us, I didn't really know him. I've heard of him, how he was always nice to teachers and respectful to his peers, so I respected him. If we couldn't have a Gryffindor champion, he was an excellent choice. I joined the applause of those around us.

"*Harry Potter*," I heard Dumbledore say, shaking me out of my thoughts. I looked around and realized what was happening.

Dumbledore held a piece of parchment in his hand and a look of bewilderment of his face.

Harry had been chosen as a second Hogwarts champion. The buzz of the room slowly ascended. Harry... was... the *second*... Hogwarts champion... How was that possible? I knew immediately that something didn't add up. Slowly, as if he in a funeral march, Harry walked past all of us and through the doors that the other three champions proceeded through. The professors, headmasters, Bagman, and Crouch all exchanged looks of confusion and doubt. One by one, they stood from their chairs and followed the last champion.

I jumped out of my seat and replaced Harry's body next to Ron. "What is going on?" I asked, for if anyone knew, it would be them.

"I don't know," Hermione admitted.

Ron had bent the spoon that he was holding. His face said it all. He was angry. "He didn't bother to tell me," Ron growled.

"Didn't you see his face?" I questioned. "He had no idea!" I looked at Hermione for help.

"She's right," Hermione agreed. "He was clueless."

"Like bloody hell he was," Ron muttered. He smacked his plate across the table and walked off towards the Common Room. Hermione yelped as pudding hit her in the face.

This was the first time Ron and Harry found themselves in a row. Hermione and I both took it upon ourselves to talk some sense into the friends. I offered my services for Ron and Hermione took Harry.

I found Ron outside one evening actually doing homework underneath a tree. The cool fall air blew my hair to and fro as I sat down beside my dear brother. I sat patiently for a few minutes, but when he did not acknowledge my presence, I closed his book.

"Ginny!" he growled at me. "I need to finish this."

"No, you need to stop being such a git!" I said.

"Shove off," he muttered and leaned against the tree. "I'm not the one who lied to his best mate." He pointed a finger at himself. "I'm the honest one."

"Do you really think Harry put his name in that Goblet?"

"Of course, he did! He's always showing off."

"Showing off?" I hissed. Was my brother really that daft?

"He doesn't care about the rules," Ron said loudly. "He was the one who HAD to save the Philosopher's Stone. He's the one who HAD to find the Chamber of Secrets. He's the one who HAD to look for Sirius Black."

"Have you forgotten *why* he was looking for the Chamber, Ron?" I questioned venomously.

Ron shook his head and went on. "What about the other stuff then?"

I explained the best I could. Harry had done all those things to save other people, me included, and not for the fame and attention it would bring him. Putting his name into the Goblet of Fire against Dumbledore's rule would be a selfish act and would only be for personal gain; an action that was completely out of character for him. He saved the Stone to stop Voldemort, not to live forever. He risked a lot to save Sirius.

He looked at me in surprise. "How do you know about Sirius?"

"It doesn't matter," I said quickly. "What matters is that you are wrong on this one-"

Ron cut me off. "Of course, you would take his side. You've fancied him since you first saw him."

"Ronald Bilius Weasley!" I screamed and jumped to my feet, once again feeling much like my mother. "How dare you accuse me...?" I couldn't even finish the sentence. I shot him the nastiest look I had

ever given anyone and stormed off towards the castle. Steaming and red in the face, I couldn't believe that Ron would claim that I was taking Harry's side just because I fancied him. The idiot! The prat! The git! I am sure I spoke a few other choice words on my journey back to the Gryffindor Common Room.

"Ron is hopeless," I said to Hermione two mornings before the First Task. I stuck my fork into my eggs and lifted the food to my lips. I blew the heat off with my breath and took the first bite.

"Harry isn't any better," Hermione admitted, taking a bite of toast. "He and I both know that Ron doesn't *really* believe it. Ron is just jealous."

I could see that. Harry had to be the most talked about wizard in the world and Ron happened to be his best friend. "I hate to see them so angry at each other. I take great comfort in knowing you three will always be together. It's one of the few things I can depend on," I said, sipping my juice.

Hermione blushed. "That means a lot to me."

Deciding the topic of Ron fighting Harry was too depressing, I changed the subject to something far more light. "How is the *homework* assignment coming along?"

Hermione frowned in thought and finally recalled what we had discussed before the school year began. "Oh yes that," she said, distracting herself with the remainder of her eggs. "It's just, well, I think Harry needs support right now more than Ron does, and I haven't done much research. I, er, I still don't know how to feel about it."

"Couldn't happen to have anything to do with..." I grinned and pointed to an old *Daily Prophet* laying a few feet away. "...your love for Harry Potter?"

Hermione grabbed the paper and flung it across the room. Pages flew in every direction. "I'm sorry, Ginny. Rita is a foul woman. You don't really believe..."

"Of course not," I said. "You would never do that to me." We sat in silence for a few moments as we continued to shove our breakfast into our mouths. I figured I would raise another interesting topic. "Do you think Krum will do well in the First Task?"

Hermione snorted. "He better, for all the research he's doing. He's always in the library. It's rather annoying, especially when his fan club shows up."

Before I could respond, Harry interrupted our breakfast. "Hermione, I need your help," he said, not bothering to sit down.

"Fancy some breakfast, Harry?" I offered.

He turned, finally noticing me. "Oh hi, Ginny. No, thanks. Not feeling the best."

Hermione quickly wolfed down the remainder of her meal, said goodbye to me, and left me sitting alone. I was hoping this was about reconciling with Ron. Finishing my breakfast, I strolled off to find Ron and see if he was in pleasant mood yet and if he wasn't, I would have someone to practice my Bat-Bogey Hex on.

The First Task was a terrifying ordeal but Harry was phenomenal. He summoned his broom with the spell Hermione taught him. He raced the Horntail around the stadium until he claimed his egg. Gryffindor was ecstatic. Harry may have come out of the task relatively unscathed with the prize, but the real prize was that Ron finally admitted that he was wrong and the two boys made up.

When the announcement of the Yule Ball was finally made, it changed the atmosphere of the school dramatically. I found myself waiting extra long at meals with the Trio, hoping and wishing that Harry would finally notice me. Much to my dismay, he would nervously glance over at Cho. I found myself walking the same hallways after classes that I knew Harry would be taking, begging him silently to ask me to the Ball. Much to my horror, a myriad of girls cornered him at every turn. Harry looked adorable declining each one.

Utterly annoyed, I slumped down on Hermione's bed. I was frustrated. Other boys had begun to notice me. In fact, I declined two offers from

boys in Harry's year just so I would still be available if Harry decided to ask. Why could I capture the attention of every one else but not the boy I so desired?

"No luck yet?" Hermione questioned me. I glanced at her and she looked just as frustrated as I felt. She had undoubtedly been doing the same thing, patiently waiting for her Prince Charming to sweep her off her feet. Unfortunately, her Prince Charming was the most clueless redheaded wizard in the school, perhaps the world.

"No." I sighed. "You?"

"No."

Parvati and Lavender came through the door. Lavender turned pink, and smiled wider than I had ever seen her smiling. They saw me and squealed. "Ginny!" Parvati said. "You have to let us do your hair for the Ball!"

"I'm not going," I admitted.

"I thought Michael Corner had asked you," Lavender accused.

Funny thing is, he did. I had never met the boy before until he had spoken to me at lunch. He apparently had been admiring me for most of the school year so far and wanted to take me to the dance. I blushed fiercely and told him I had to decline. Then I ran away.

"I said no," I replied.

"Why?" Parvati asked. "He's a handsome bloke." She looked at me curiously, studied my face, and made a gesture of understanding. "You're waiting for Harry, aren't you?"

"No," I lied. I needed to stop wearing my heart on my sleeve like this. It was getting ridiculous that everyone was so aware of my feelings. Desperate to change the subject, I asked the girls who their dates were.

"Seamus just asked me," Lavender squealed, turning a darker shade of pink than before. Parvati surprised me when she admitted no one

had asked her yet. She was a beautiful girl. I bet most boys were intimidated by her and thought she would already have a date.

"Did Ron ask you yet?" Parvati asked Hermione.

Hermione became flustered. "What?" she asked. "No... I mean... why... Ron? Why would he ask me? We're just friends."

"Don't worry. There's still time," Lavender replied. "Or *you* could always ask *him*."

"I am not asking him to the Ball!" Hermione shrieked. She stood up. "If you will excuse me, I need to do some research." She grabbed her bag and stormed off from the room, leaving me sitting in her bed.

"I don't know who she is trying to fool," Parvati said. "She's been so flustered around him since the announcement of the Ball."

I shrugged. I felt just as angry as Hermione did. I needed to blow off some steam. It was time for some alone time. I said goodbye to the girls and went to the Quidditch pitch. I took out my wand and practiced a few spells, attempting the Bat-Bogey Hex on a few unsuspecting birds. It was somewhat successful.

"We meet again, Ginny," said a voice from behind me. I turned to the sound and saw Zacharias Smith and two of his Hufflepuff team members standing there, each holding their own broom. I sighed in relief, knowing that Zacharias was in my year, and he couldn't ask me to the Ball.

"Hello, Zacharias," I muttered. "I was just leaving."

"You lucked out, Weasley," Zacharias smirked. "Dumbledore canceling the Quidditch season. Mighty fortunate for you."

I purposefully lifted my wand to eye level, pretending that I was inspecting it. "What's your point, Zacharias?"

"Fancy a race?" he suggested. "If I win, you go to the Ball with Summerby here..." He pointed to his friend. I recognized him as the Seeker. "But you dance with me at the Ball."

Summerby shook his head. "Ginny, you don't have to do this."

I ignored Summerby's remark. I knew, of course, that I was able to fly much faster than Smith and I was eager to prove the idiot wrong. "What if I win?" I asked him curiously.

"Your choice."

I thought for a long second. What would be the worst thing for a boy like him? Quitting the Quidditch team? No. Not embarrassing enough. Leaving me alone forever? Then who would I practice my hexing on? I had it... I liked the girl and had no problem with her, but all the boys detested her. "You have to let Eloise Midgen to take you to the Ball... and you have to be a gentleman."

Smith gritted his teeth. He forcibly took Summerby's broom and threw it to me. "You're on," he hissed as I caught the broom. "Twice around the perimeter of the pitch."

I agreed. We both stood side by side next to one of the Quidditch scoring hoops. Summerby stood in front of us and raised his wand into the air. When the red sparks flew up, Smith and I took off around the pitch.

Surprisingly, he was a fast flyer. Watching him on the field during games was misleading. In the game, he was stopping and starting. When it came to straight flying, he was quick but not quick enough that I couldn't keep up with him. I was in line with him as we passed through the first lap.

I pulled ahead. I laughed victoriously as I felt him trying to gain unsuccessfully. I heard him swear as we neared the finish line. Closer, closer... and then I felt the broom fly uncontrollably away from the perimeter. That cheater! He must have hexed my broom as I neared the end. I heard him laugh as the runaway broom flew out of the stadium.

I crashed into a tree. I swore as I spit out a leaf that was in my mouth. Grumbling, I sat there contemplating the many ways I was going to hex him into oblivion.

I heard a voice below me say, "Explain yourself! Andrei says you are in that library every day where that Mudblood studies. We agreed before we left our school that we would not associate with their kind."

I peered through the leaves and saw Igor Karkaroff. He was obviously extremely angry. I tried silently to see who he was talking to.

"No, I haff never agreed to that!" The voice was strong and deep. "I vill not share your prejudice!"

"Viktor, be reasonable!" Karkaroff shouted. So it was Krum he was talking to... and then everything clicked into place. Krum was in the library because he had an interest in Hermione. I put my hand over my mouth in surprise.

"I am being reasonable!" Krum shouted back. "I vill ask her to the Yule Ball. You vill not stop me!"

Karkaroff made a noise of disgust. "You have brought shame to *everything* Durmstrang stands for!"

"No. You haff done that yourself!" Krum's heavy steps pounded on the grass as he departed. Karkaroff's lighter steps soon followed.

When I climbed from the tree minutes later, I took off towards the library. I contemplated telling Hermione what I had heard, but decided against it. If it were me and Harry was going to ask me, I wouldn't want the surprise ruined. Instead I was going to convince her to stop waiting for Ron.

Madam Pince screamed at me for running in the library. I slowed down to a jog and found Hermione several moments later. She had been crying. To cover it up, she skimmed the pages of a book about the suppression of goblins. I took my seat across from her.

She glanced up. "Hi, Ginny," she muttered and tried to take the attention off her tear-soaked cheeks. "I don't care what Harry says, I know he's having trouble with the next task..."

I honestly wasn't concerned about those things at this time. "I've been thinking," I started. "You should..."

She interrupted me, almost as if she hadn't even hear me speak. "I'm not going to wait for Ron to ask me," she said quietly.

I stared at her. Well, at least it wasn't going to be hard to convince her. "I agree with you," I replied. "You're tearing yourself up over him. He's not worth so many tears..." and I stopped talking and thought of Harry. Was he worth the trouble? Was he worth waiting for?

"I know," Hermione whispered. I took her hand and smiled compassionately. "Do you really want to go to the Ball, Ginny?" I nodded. "I'm sorry to tell you this, but I think you should stop waiting for Harry to ask you."

I nodded solemnly, understanding. He wasn't interested. He wasn't going to ask me. He was going ask Cho. My insides twisted again at the thought of her. For a fleeting moment, I considered trying to hook Cho up with someone else, but that would be evil, and I couldn't do that to Harry.

"We're such silly little girls," Hermione said, followed by a fake laugh. "Crying over stupid boys." She closed the book she was reading and pushed it away. "I'm tired of reading." She placed her head on the desk and sighed. It was a clear sign of frustration if that girl did not want to read anymore.

I took the book from her. "Do you want me to put it away?" I asked her and she mumbled something that resembled *I don't care*. I stood and journeyed behind one of the bookcases to return the publication. Finding the appropriate place, I pushed a leaning book to the side and looked through the gap in the shelf.

Viktor Krum stood before Hermione at the table. She had not even noticed that he was standing there yet. If she had heard someone approach, she might have thought it was me.

"Excuse me," Krum said as soft as he could, in case Hermione was sleeping.

Hermione's head popped up. If I could see the expression of her face, I'm sure it would have made me laugh. "Oh," she said, a bit too chipper. "Hi."

"I haff wanted to talk to you for some time," Krum said, looking a bit sheepish. "You do not look at me like the other girls do."

"Oh well... I..."

"I haff come here ven you are here but I haff been too shy to approach you."

An international Quidditch star was too shy to approach a girl? Oh, if Ron could only hear this. I wondered what he would think.

"Too shy?" Hermione whispered.

He extended his hand to her. "My name is Viktor Krum," he said, and I rolled my eyes. Who didn't know who he was? He took Hermione's hand and kissed the top of it. "Vat is your name?"

"Hermione Granger." Her voice was trembling slightly.

Krum nodded, trying to comprehend the difficult name. He frowned.

You're going to have a ripe good time with that one, aren't you? I thought.

Krum's frown turned into a smile. "Hermy-own," he said. "The papers say you are Harry Potter's girlfriend."

I think I could *feel* the heat from Hermione's blushing. "The papers are lying."

Krum's smile widened. That was certainly what he had wanted to hear. "Vill you honor me and take my arm at the Yule Ball?"

"What...? You mean go with you?" Hermione gasped a little bit. "Viktor, I would love to go the Ball with you."

Krum bowed slightly. He turned from the table and left the library. I watched Hermione put her hands to her face and squealed in excitement.

"You can come out now," she called, glancing over her shoulder.

I strolled out like I owned the place and took my seat across from her. I pretended I had not witnessed the scene. "I had a hard time finding where that book was supposed to go," I said nonchalantly.

"Sure you did," she said. Her smile was so bright. "Now we need to find you a date."

Later that day, I stepped out of Potions class with Delia. She was talking about not being able to go the Ball because no one had asked her yet. She said she was going to go the Common Room and wait for the next unsuspecting upperclassman and make him take her. I caught a glimpse of Neville sitting by himself on a bench. He looked so sad. I told Delia to go on without me.

I sat beside the depressed boy. "Why so sad, Neville?"

He glanced up, looking surprised. I doubt he even realized I had sat down until I had greeted him. He forced a smile and said, "Nothing, Ginny."

"I am the master at pretending that nothing is wrong. You can't fool me."

Neville looked slightly embarrassed. I suppose it wasn't his fault. Gryffindors are not known for hiding their emotions easily, and that's both a blessing and a curse. "I asked Hermione to the Ball and she said no."

He had asked Hermione? That was news to me. I never thought of Neville actually *liking* girls. I suppose it made sense. Hermione had always been very nice to Neville, helped him with lessons, and paid much more attention to him than most girls did.

"Do you think Hermione was lying to me when she said she already had a date?"

"Trust me, Neville. She has a date."

Neville nodded. He didn't really think Hermione would be so superficial. He leaned forward and put his face in his hands. "Ginny," he started.

I knew exactly what he was about to ask before he had said it. Neville was comfortable around me. I knew he didn't fancy me and he knew that I didn't fancy him. And before he even asked, I knew I would accept his offer. He was a sweet young man, maybe not the smartest, handsomest, or most organized bloke, but he wasn't concerned with looks like my brother and Harry. Okay, maybe Harry wasn't concerned with looks and his crush on Cho was about more than her beauty. If Harry wasn't going to ask me to the Yule Ball, I might as well go with Neville and have fun.

"Will you, er, I mean, will you go to the, the, uh, the Ball..."

"Of course I will, Neville." I replied.

"I'm not sure which one is more pathetic." It was Harper exiting the potions classroom. "Whether Longbottom was that desperate to ask a Mudblood and a weasel in the same day," he sneered, "or that the Weasel actually wants to go with him."

Neville didn't say anything when I stood up. "Harper, if you don't shut up, I will hex you like I did at the World Cup."

Harper automatically grabbed the shoulder where the spell had hit him months ago. "I still owe you for that one, Weasley. You better watch your back."

I stepped closer to him. "Why not just do something about it now? I have nowhere else to be." Our noses were touching, and I was secretly begging him to try something. I was itching to try out the Bat-Bogey Hex.

"Making threats, Weasley?" This time it was Snape. He stood behind Harper and demonstrated his trademark sneer. "Ten points from Gryffindor," he said. "And why are you lingering in the dungeon when class has been over for ten minutes now?"

"Longbottom was begging her to go to the dance with him." Harper grinned.

“How... touching,” Snape said. He looked at me with disgust. “If his dating technique is anything like his potion making skills, Weasley, it is going to leave something to be desired.”

I attempted to restrain my temper and tongue. I couldn't talk back to Snape or it would mean more points taken away. I'd like to hex him but that would mean a considerable amount more punishment. I glanced at Harper. He smirked at me. I shot daggers into him with my eyes.

“Run along, Weasley,” Snape commanded. “Or I will take an extra five points away from Gryffindor for loitering in the halls.”

I gave Snape the same look, turned around to walk with Neville, but he was gone.

Days later, I slammed open the Fat Lady's picture and exited the Common Room. Standing outside it, I shook with anger and I shook with sadness. *You will not cry, Ginny* but I couldn't stop at least two tears that managed to escape. I had just found out that Harry had asked Cho to the Ball.

I never thought that Harry would find the courage. After all the nervous looks he had given her since last year, I thought he was too chicken to do it. I had told myself that whomever Harry asked, I was not going to be angry. I swore up and down that I was going to be happy for him.

I kicked the banister of the stairwell and grunted in frustration. I felt the progress dealing with my crush reverting. I started making petty arguments in my head.

He only likes her because she's pretty. Well, aren't I pretty, too? The boys who asked me to the Ball are proof. Someone thinks I'm worth the trouble. Maybe it's because she's a good Quidditch player. I'm good; I just haven't had my chance to prove myself. I know, it's because she's older. Well, there's nothing I can do there. She wins that round.

She already had a date though. That thought alone should have consoled me but it failed to do so. Harry had still asked her... *her*, not

me. I shouldn't have been so angry. Harry wasn't mine to be angry over. He was free to fall in love with whomever he wished.

Then Ron, my stupid brother, had to offer me up as if he owned me to Harry. Harry would have done the nice thing and agreed to take me. That's just the kind of guy he is. I know that if I could just show Harry how fun he could have with me, I could take his mind away from Cho forever. But I had a date. I couldn't have waited a few more days. I just *had* to have a date.

Shame on you! I scolded myself. *Neville was a sweet caring individual and I should be happy to have him as a date. He just wasn't... he just wasn't... Don't you say it, Ginny... Don't you dare say it...*

The portrait door swung open and Hermione stepped out. She greeted me with a half-hearted smile. "They finally asked us," she said softly.

"Technically," I said, "Harry didn't ask me. Ron did it for him." I pulled her closer to me and put my arm around her shoulders. "Is he ever going to notice me, Hermione?"

Hermione smiled and shrugged. "He's too caught up with Cho right now," she admitted. She was quiet for a few seconds. "But that's because he doesn't know who you are."

"He knows who I am."

"You're too afraid to be yourself in front of him," Hermione stated. "You are exactly what that boy needs in his life, but all he sees is the shy, blushing, little sister of his best mate. If you relaxed and were yourself, he'd see, but you have to stop waiting for him to notice accidentally and start *making* him notice purposefully."

She wasn't being mean. She was being truthful. And I knew in the way she said it that she wasn't just referring to Harry and me. She was right. For the first time, I actually considered giving up on Harry, but I declined. "I'm not ready to do that yet."

"Neither am I," she whispered. "Let's get dinner"

Mum sent me simple red robes that showed much of my back. I would have preferred to wow spectators with a better view, if you know what I mean, but I was satisfied. I let Parvati and Lavender finally do my hair and I had to admit that it looked amazing.

Hermione looked gorgeous. She used about ten gallons of hair straightener, but it was well worth it. Her robes were periwinkle blue. It was too bad that she hadn't dressed up to impress Krum. It was all for Ron. It was all to show Ron what he was missing out on.

With no offense to Neville, he is a horrid dancer. My feet killed me by the end of the night. I glanced over at Harry and he was having only a little less trouble than Neville. At least he could stay off his date's feet. Harry looked over at me just as Neville once again found my toes. I winced but said nothing. When I threw my gaze back over to Harry, he looked terrified and I couldn't help to think he was adorable.

I scanned the room and found Ron had not even come out on the dance floor yet. He must have finally saw Hermione with Krum. *Serves him right*, I thought. He had every opportunity to ask her. While brooding over Ron's stupidity, Harry also found his seat next to my brother. Another dissatisfied customer. At least Hermione was having a good time.

"Neville, do you mind if I ask your lovely date to dance?"

I turned my head and stifled a gasp. Michael Corner stood beside us. He wore blue and bronze colored robes, the same color of Ravenclaw, his house. His dark hair was slicked back in the most precise way. His emerald eyes looked at me with adoration. I daresay, at that moment, I forgot about Harry Potter. Michael Corner was all that I was looking at.

"Er..." Neville said, looking at me, making sure I was okay with it. Realizing that I was, he said, "No, I don't mind."

Michael took my hand and led me away. Gliding across the dance floor, I was lost in his handsomeness, his green eyes, his strong jaw line, the way his robes outlined his muscles ever so slightly. I couldn't bear to say anything, thinking that it couldn't be real.

"You told me you weren't coming to the dance," Michael said, his mouth so close to my ear that I felt his breath on my lobes.

"I changed my mind," I replied softly. I felt safe in his arms. I never desired so much to be in one particular place before. Harry and I had never shared a moment like this.

"If Longbottom was your boyfriend, you could have just told me," Michael said. "I would have understood."

"Neville and I are just friends," I answered.

"That's what I wanted to hear," he stated.

My heart skipped a beat. He was so confident in himself. My arms clenched in an incalculable amount. I could barely detect it, but the Ravenclaw holding me must have. He drew me in closer to himself.

"I was sure when you rejected me that you were taken," Michael admitted. "I must say that I am surprised to find a girl of your beauty lacking a proper suitor."

And charming! This was the first boy that had ever complimented me like that. He had said that I had beauty! Before I could stop myself, I was saying, "I'm not sure why you're so concerned." I continued, putting every ounce of flirtatious expertise into my words, "Unless, of course, you're looking to fill the position."

"It crossed my mind."

The music had stopped and I did not seem to care or notice. Before I could respond, Cedric Diggory and Cho Chang had walked up, hand in hand. Michael and I parted, but his hand lingered ever so lightly on my own.

"I wanted to thank you, Michael, for introducing me such a wonderful girl," Cedric said, and shook Michael's hand. For the first time, I looked at Cho and did not want to hex her brains out. They looked so happy together.

"My pleasure," Michael said.

"I don't believe I have officially met your date," Cedric said, and I didn't bother to correct him. "We took the Portkey to the Quidditch World Cup together, didn't we? You're a Weasley."

"I thought I looked more like a Malfoy, but shows what I know," I said and they laughed. I made a Triwizard Champion laugh. I made an incredible Seeker laugh. I made *Michael* laugh. I could definitely get used to making Michael laugh. "Ginny," I introduced myself.

"Pleased to meet you," Cedric smiled.

As he smiled, I noticed a fading scar beneath his lip that he had sustained during the First Task against the dragons. Immediately, I recalled how Harry had helped Cedric with that task and what Hermione had said in the library about Harry having trouble with the next one. I mentally kicked myself for being so concerned about Harry when I was standing next to two of the handsomest blokes in Hogwarts.

"I would have said this earlier if we had talked before this," I started, "but good job on the First Task, and I mean that."

"He was very brave," Cho added.

He thanked me, and I asked, "How is the Second Task coming along?" Hopefully, no one would change the subject.

"I had a tough time with it at first," Cedric admitted. "I actually just figured it out this morning. I can relax for awhile now."

I tried to make my next statement as casual as possible. "I heard our Gryffindor champion is having a bit of trouble with it." I had hoped he would catch my hint. *You owe him one.*

Cedric nodded and didn't say anything. I hoped that was a good thing. He said his farewell and led Cho off to the punch table. I watched them leave, begging Cedric silently that he would seek Harry out tonight, and felt a twinge of annoyance that Harry was having a horrible time because he was not here with Cho.

"Uh oh," Michael said. I thought he had read my mind and found that I was thinking about Harry again. Instead, he pointed towards the tables. "Looks like your brother and Hermione are having a good time."

"What?" I asked, half expecting Ron and Hermione to be dancing together and enjoying each other's company. Instead, Hermione looked furious as she towered over Ron, who looked just as angry. I snuck through the crowd for a better spot to listen. Apparently, their argument had been going on for longer than we had noticed. I only caught the end of it.

"Why don't you go find *Vicky*, he'll be wondering where you are," Ron said.

"*Don't call him Vicky!*" Hermione hissed. She turned where she stood and rampaged towards all of us on the dance floor. I stole a glance at Michael and he motioned for me to follow her.

When I caught up with her, she looked furious. As she paced, muttering incoherently, I approached her. When she saw me, she stopped and looked at me. "Your brother infuriates me!" Hermione growled. "I don't understand why he cares so much that I'm here with Viktor. Can't he wrap his head around the idea that someone might be interested in me because I'm actually interesting?"

"It only proves he's starting to notice you, Hermione," I assured her.

She laughed pathetically. "If it's because he's jealous, then he should have asked me!" She let out an exasperated grunt.

"Why don't you stop worrying about Ron and have fun dancing with Krum." I suggested.

She nodded, the look of rage still on her face. "I'll take a page out of your book, Ginny," she said. "I saw you dancing with Michael Corner."

I merely nodded. "He's very charming and handsome, and he wants..." Less than a quarter of an hour before this, I would have been ecstatic to tell Hermione that Michael wanted to be my boyfriend,

when I was lost in the dance that he and I shared, transfixed by the words he was saying to me, but the immediate need to help Harry had released me from my hypnotic trance.

"Did he ask you out?" Hermione squealed.

"Not really," I replied, "but I certainly think he wants the job."

"What are you going to do?"

I frowned. I honestly had no idea and I told her so. She scolded me, reminding me what we had talked about before. "Well, what are *you* going to do if Krum asks you out again?" I questioned.

Her eyes shifted towards the direction she had come from, staring down with fury in her eyes, supposedly towards Ron. She didn't answer me. Krum had come up beside her with two drinks. "Viktor, let's keep dancing." She grabbed the drinks and handed them to me. Without another word, she gripped his hand and pulled him towards the center of the dance floor.

"Ron's Little Sister!" shouted a familiar voice and two hands came over my eyes from behind my head. "Guess who!"

"Gee," I said. "Who else calls me by such an affectionate title?" I turned around and saw Dean Thomas in front of me. I handed him the extra butterbeer and asked, "Who are you here with?"

"Right now?" Dean pondered. He put his hand over his brow and scanned the room. "I think all the dames in here are with me right now."

"In your dreams," I mocked him.

He playfully put an arm around my shoulder and I took pleasure in knowing he would never touch me had Ron been watching. "Little Sis," he said, "when are you going to stop playing with my heart and go out with me?"

I shoved his arm away. "When are you going to stop thinking of me as your friend's little sister and treat me like the lady I am?"

“Is tonight too soon?” he asked, but pulled a pocket watch from his robes. “I’m sorry. It’s past your bedtime. Maybe tomorrow?”

Ever since Ron had introduced me to his dorm mate, he had been calling me by the aforementioned nickname. We developed an interesting bond right away. He was always teasing me about my age and mock-hitting on me and I was always shooting him down. It was a fun relationship, but if you told me that I’d be dating him by this time in two years, I would have asked you if I’d be taking a love potion.

Excusing myself from Dean’s company, I danced with Neville a few more times, much to the horror of my toes. We talked about Hermione, Krum, Ron, and Harry. We spoke of the Tournament and the coming tasks. I loved talking to Neville. He made me comfortable with who I was.

When I searched for Michael in the crowd, I could not find him. I had hoped for one more dance with the boy. I had hoped for one more moment like the one we shared before. Strange how much I wanted to say goodnight to him. Strange how much I wanted to kiss him.

After the Yule Ball, Michael seemed to disappear completely. I caught glimpses of him at meals and in the hallways, but there was no indication that we had shared more than just a friendly dance. I began to think he danced with me to settle a bet or was put up to by Harper and Vaisey to make me a fool.

Hermione and I spoke frequently about all our little problems. She and Ron had made up and were pretending the arguments had never transpired. Ron continued to harbor ill feelings towards Krum. Harry still searched for Cho in large crowds. Hermione was back on her SPEW kick.

She told me to find Michael and settle things, but I refused to play the desperate little girl with a crush again. If Michael was interested, he would find me. Besides, I told Hermione, I still didn’t know if I was ready to give up on Harry, although with every glance he gave Cho, the more and more I hoped for Michael to seek me out.

The Second Task looked far easier than the First Task. Braving through Merpeople and grindylows seemed mild compared to fighting

dragons. As I had hoped, Cedric passed the information on to Harry, though it took the boy until five minutes before the task began to figure everything out. It turned out that Harry misinterpreted the clue and thought the ones that weren't saved were going to die. I couldn't help but admire his desire to be everyone's hero.

On an evening not too long after the Second Task, I awoke dreadfully scared from a nap. I awoke so suddenly that I knocked the book I was reading off my bed. I hadn't tried to fall asleep, but I did, and I was back in the Chamber of Secrets for a few long hours.

If I knew Delia and the other girls, they would be back at any moment. I needed some alone time. I needed fresh air. Glancing out the window, I saw flurries of snow descending quietly towards the earth. I grabbed a scarf and other warm winter apparel and took my transgressions outside.

I practiced my Bat-Bogey Hex on some snow pixies. I was pretty sure that I had mastered the spell without flaw but I was still itching to try it on Harper, Malfoy, or Smith. I watched the pixies fly away, annoyed as little bogey bats trailed behind them.

It had stopped snowing. A fresh blanket of white covered the ground. I stood at the edge of the lake, thinking about the previous task. If they had waited a couple more days, the water would have been covered with a sheet of ice. The lake looked peaceful, especially since the gray clouds were rolling away and revealing the evening sky behind them.

I hadn't heard him approach me. The snow must have masked his footsteps. He placed a hand on my shoulder and I didn't need to see his face to recognize his gentle touch. I had been thinking about it since we danced. "I've been looking for you tonight," Michael said softly.

I had questions for him to answer such as where he disappeared to at the Yule Ball and why it took him two months to approach me again, but when I saw his handsome face against the backdrop of the sky, I no longer cared.

"Have you?"

Michael smiled. It was such a wondrous smile. I shivered with excitement and he mistook it for me being cold. He took off his coat and slipped it around my shoulders. I didn't have the heart to tell him I was feeling uncharacteristically warm. I wrapped his coat around me tightly, his scent wafting from the fabric and caressing my senses.

Without saying anything else, Michael came closer to me and I never wanted a kiss more than then, and not just a kiss from Harry that was never going to happen, but a kiss from someone who so desperately wanted it also. He lingered for a moment, stared deep into my eyes, teasing me, keeping from me what I wanted.

And his lips were on mine and that's all it took to be hooked on Michael Corner. Beneath the stars, he kissed me. While a beautiful blanket of snow was our platform, he kissed me. While the lake stood still and frozen, he kissed me. And while he kissed me, I kissed him back.

Much to my dismay, he parted from me. I wanted more. I had not realized how much I loved kissing. I had *liked* it when Colin kissed me, but I hadn't *wanted* it. This was different. I craved this. I hungered for this. I needed this.

His green eyes met my brown, and he whispered, "So who's Tom?"

And my dream world came to a screeching halt. My voice changed from the dream-like sound I had been using to much similar to my Mum. "What do you mean Tom?"

Michael didn't smile. It was obvious to him that he had touched a nerve. "I'm sorry, Ginny. Delia said that you say his name in your sleep. *Tom Riddle*."

As I said before, very few people knew what happened in the Chamber of Secrets. Delia was one of those people who had no clue and I couldn't tell her. She wouldn't understand, not really.

I had no idea what emotion to feel. I had no idea how to react. He didn't know, of course, who Tom Riddle was and what it meant to me. How could I pass up such a handsome bloke just because he made a simple mistake? Despite my reasoning, I could not dismiss the fact

that whatever urges fuelled by hormones or affection I had were now melting like the snow eventually would.

Michael was holding my hand, but he dropped it. "I'm sorry. I thought..."

Pressing a finger against his lips, I stopped him from talking. I conjured up the best truthful statement I could. "Tom Riddle," I said, shuddering. "is someone from my past who hurt me deeply. I still have nightmares about him."

He must have regretted dropping my hand because I saw his hand twitch to grab hold again. He decided against it. "What did he do?"

"I don't want to talk about it!" I shouted, much louder than I had intended. He cringed. I took off his coat and handed it back to him. "I like you, Michael, but I think this was a mistake."

I left him standing there beside the lake, the cool wind blowing through the trees, the powdered snow wrapping itself around him as he stood there. I didn't bother to look back, because to look back would mean regret, and I didn't want him to know how much I regretted walking away. I had broken my first heart.

Hermione tried to convince me to give him another chance and I knew she was right. But I also realized that Tom Riddle was going to haunt me for the rest of my life and no handsome boy was going to be able to help that or understand that, except for the one boy who had been able to rescue me from his clutches in the first place, and he was too busy looking at Cho and trying to save the Wizarding world.

When the champions made their way into the maze for the Third Task, no one could have anticipated what would happen. I sat with Ron, Hermione, and my family. We chatted about how exciting the Tournament had been so far and how we hoped that one of our school champions would come out victorious.

When we saw Harry and Cedric appear with the championship cup, Hogwarts cheered loudly. Ron and I jumped to our feet, fist raised in the air, and hugged each other. We had beaten the foreign schools.

Somehow through the noise, I heard Harry's desperate voice and my blood ran cold.

"He's back. He's back. Voldemort."

Chaos ensued. "He's DEAD!" I heard people scream. "Cedric Diggory's DEAD!"

I saw Cho shrieking as she raced towards the fallen champions.

Moody grabbed a disorientated Harry and led him away towards the castle. I watched the two disappear into the school doors and I immediately knew something wasn't right. The Moody that had taught us all year had repeatedly reminded us about constant vigilance and being prepared to see the worst. He had placed the Imperius Curse on us just because he said we needed to know. The imposter, as we later discovered, made his second mistake by taking Harry away from scene.

Dumbledore had seen it, too. After trying to calm the masses and Mr. Diggory, he took off with Snape and McGonagall towards Moody's office. Hermione pulled me closer and wept into my shoulder. I don't remember starting to cry, but the tears were there nevertheless.

Hours later, I couldn't handle all the weeping students and adults. I needed alone time and excused myself from my family's company. No one tried to stop me. If Voldemort was back, it would take him time to get into the school. He wasn't going to attack yet, not tonight. I journeyed through the castle corridors and eventually found that I was standing outside of Moody's office.

Word traveled fast in the school, especially through my family. Moody was an imposter. Barty Crouch, Jr. to be exact. Death Eater extraordinaire. But you already knew that. I stood outside his door and noticed that it was still open.

I touched the door slightly, looking in. How could we have missed it? How could I have missed it? My mind focused on the Sneakoscope that Moody had taken from me months before. That little gizmo hadn't missed it. It had whistled and spun and lit up as soon as Barty

stepped foot in the castle, I was sure of it. I swore to myself. And Barty knew, that's why he took it.

I pushed the door open. I wondered if he had kept it. I wanted it back, of course, because I knew it would be trustworthy. If I could find it, I would never let go of it again. I stepped carefully into the room.

"Master has been bad!" I heard crying in the back portion of the room. It sounded much like Winky, the same house-elf that had been at the World Cup.

Making as little noise as possible, I found the object a few minutes later in a drawer. It had been smashed. I sighed, and I was about to close the drawer when something caught my eye. The word "Marauders." I threw the papers that were on top of it and pulled the parchment out of the drawer. Sure enough, it was the map that was supposed to be in Harry's possession. How Barty ever came across it was a mystery to me but I understood why a Death Eater would want the map.

The parchment was still in its map form. I looked at it and found Harry's name in the hospital wing. Mum, Bill, Ron, Hermione, and Sirius, most likely in his Animagus form, were placed beside him. Mum was pacing. A few hallways away, Fudge, McGonagall, and Snape were rushing seemingly in their direction. Further away and coming the same way was Dumbledore.

Not even thinking twice, I rushed in the same way, keeping a lookout on the map. By the time I reached the hospital wing, Dumbledore had been inside for some time. I didn't dare go in, but I did not need to. They were arguing rather loudly.

"Voldemort has returned," Dumbledore said, and I could tell it was a point that had been repeated. "If you accept that fact straightaway, Fudge, and take the necessary measures, we may still be able to save the situation..."

But Fudge was not listening to reason. Fudge would hear nothing Dumbledore had to say. He was, as Dumbledore said it, "blinded by the love of the office he held." I eventually heard him say, "We have

reached a parting of the ways,” and, “If you are against him then we remain, Cornelius, on the same side.”

Eventually, Fudge stormed out of the room and slammed the door, looking angry and scared. He noticed me but thought nothing of it. After all, my Mum was in the room with Harry. He muttered, “Preposterous!” and was gone.

Later, when everyone had left Harry’s side, I snuck into the hospital wing and sat beside the sleeping boy. I took his hand in mine and fought tears. “Things are changing, Harry,” I whispered, knowing he couldn’t hear me.

I spoke softly and told him how I’d changed and how I knew that he didn’t need me when he had Ron and Hermione. I told him how I’d made an important decision. I told him how much he meant to me, but how I couldn’t keep hurting myself like this. I told him that I needed someone to hold me and how I thought I’d found someone who wanted the job. I told him... I told him...

“I’m over you,” I cried, knowing full well that I wasn’t. Seeing him there in a dreamless sleep and knowing he would wake up remembering the horrible events that taken place made me weep even more. I thought about what Hermione said: *You are exactly what he needs in his life*. But I knew he didn’t realize that yet and I didn’t know if he would ever realize it, but I couldn’t wait for him. I needed to move on.

I placed the map on my lap, pointed the wand at it, and cried, “Mischief Managed.” I folded the parchment up and placed it in the pocket of his robes. I stood up, stole one more glance at his peaceful face, and whispered, “I love you, Harry Potter.”

The train ride home was relatively peaceful. I rode with Delia and my other roommates. She was asking me about my summer plans but I said very little. She said she didn’t know if she was coming back next year since every year she had attended had been dangerous. I didn’t respond.

Michael walked by and before I knew it, I jumped from my seat, opened the door, and called his name. He stopped in the corridor and

turned to me. His face, his handsome face, told the tale. He was sad, and maybe he had just learned to cope with the rejection, and now I was coming back into his life.

"Hello, Ginny," he said glumly.

I didn't say anything. I walked up to him and embraced him. Putting my arms around his waist, I pulled him close and he hugged me back. He held me tight and I felt safe.

"I like you, Michael," I said to him softly. "If you're still interested in the job, I've begun looking for proper suitors."

He smiled. "What makes you think I'm not over you?"

"This." Standing on my tiptoes, I raised myself to his lips and kissed him gently.

When I pulled back, he took me by the hand and led me to his compartment. I glanced back at Delia and she gave me the thumbs up. We passed by Harry's cart and I caught Hermione's eye. They widened as I held up our entwined hands.

Sitting in his cart with Terry Boot and Anthony Goldstein, I explained to him that I didn't know what this summer was going to be like for me. If I could visit, I would. If I could write, I would. But if not, I would still like to be his girlfriend, that is, if he'd still have me. He agreed.

When the train pulled up to King's Cross, I watched Ron and Hermione walk out from their compartment, followed by Fred and George. They had stopped abruptly and turned back around to face whoever was left in the room. I told Michael I'd catch up with him.

Standing just out of sight, I heard George's voice, "There's got to be a thousand Galleons in here."

"Yeah," Harry's voice said. "Think how many Canary Creams that is. Just don't tell your mum where you got it..."

My mouth popped open. Harry was giving away his Triwizard Championship winnings to Fred and George. It made sense to me

that Harry wouldn't want it, but to give it Fred and George for their joke shop? Mum was going to be furious.

Harry exited without noticing me and I jumped over Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle and stepped inside the compartment, just as they were hiding the money inside their bags. "Hello, boys," I greeted. "What are you hiding?"

"What makes you think...?"

I stopped Fred in mid-sentence. "Do you remember who you're talking to?" I asked mischievously. "Do you really think I didn't overhear what just happened?"

Fred and George looked at each other in surprise and then back to me. "I've always said you were a clever little witch," George said.

"Don't forget it," I said.

"Draco?" I heard a familiar voice scream. Turning around, I saw Harper standing there dumbfounded at the three Slytherins lying on the floor with hex marks all over their body. "What the...?" and he looked at us. "Weasleys! I should have known! What have you done?" he shouted.

"A bit of redecorating," Fred laughed.

"Though I don't think I like the new carpeting," I smirked.

"I told you to watch your back, little Weasley!" he hissed.

Harper pulled out his wand. I had never been happier to see it. I may not have been as quick with a wand as I was with a broom, but I beat Harper to the draw. "*Chiroptera!*" I shouted and black and purple lights hit Harper right in the nose.

The effect was instantaneous. Several bats escaped from his nose and began wildly attacking his face. Screaming and slapping at the bats, he fell into the compartment across from us and the door slammed shut.

My first victim on the Bat-Bogey Hex. Beautiful results, if I do say so myself. I turned my head to catch Fred and George's impressed grins.

"When is he going to learn?" Fred said, putting his hand on my shoulder.

George put his hand on my other shoulder. "Size isn't everything," he finished.

Chapter Seven: We, The Order of the Phoenix

I didn't completely grasp the magnitude of our situation. I wanted to believe that my family was safe and that we were going to lead a normal life while other wizards- better more, talented wizards, were going to fight against Voldemort and his followers. I was mistaken. My whole family was going to be involved and eventually all of us were going to be fighting side by side against the Dark Lord.

When the war finally ended three years later, my family escaped with only one casualty. I say 'only one' like it was a good thing. I should say that we were fortunate not to lose more than one family member. Some families were completely wiped out.

Voldemort took too much from us. He would have taken more if brave men and women such my Mum and Dad hadn't stood up and said they weren't going to sit idly by and allow a tyrant control the world we loved so dearly.

They were the Order of the Phoenix, a group of people who fought bravely when few others would. They may have not been the elite, but they were the best. They were ready. They were willing to sacrifice everything, even their lives, even risk their own children, if it meant tomorrow was going to be peaceful.

I don't care what Mum said to us. We- the so-called children, such as Harry, Ron, Hermione, Fred, George, and myself- were a part of The Order the moment we stepped into 12 Grimmauld Place. I think Dumbledore was the only one who understood that. He knew we weren't going to settle for being left out. It was our fight, too. It was our war, too. It was our *lives*, too.

I stood in our kitchen exactly one week after the school term ended. Mum and Dad were busy setting everything in order and sending owls to the appropriate places. We had been quickly debriefed about what was happening. We were relocating to Sirius's old place. It was going to be the new headquarters for the Order of the Phoenix.

Dad strolled through the kitchen and placed another bag next to the others. "How are you doing, Ginny?" he asked, pulling me close to him in an embrace.

"I'm okay," I answered.

"I love you," he said. He ruffled my hair with his hand. "You know, no matter how old you get, you'll always be my little girl?"

I grinned. "I better be," I replied. "I don't think Ron would have appreciated you putting *him* in dresses."

Dad raised his eyebrows. "I seem to remember *you* not liking it too much either."

I nodded. "Still don't," I replied.

"By the way, I saw your Yule Ball pictures," Dad said. "You looked pretty comfortable in your gown then."

I shrugged. "Special occasions are fine," I said.

It was then that Percy interrupted us. "Father, I have an announcement to make." He was beaming. I wasn't sure why. He had spent the previous few weeks suffering inquiry after inquiry. Apparently, the higher-ups felt that Percy should have noticed that his boss was acting strange. What could have happened in my brother's life that could brighten his mood so?

"What is it, Percy?" Dad asked. His voice was weary. He had spent the last few weeks convincing Fudge and the Ministry that he was not in league with Dumbledore. He had saved his job, but just barely.

"You are looking at the new Junior Assistant to the Ministry," Percy replied. He flashed a wide smile and expected Dad to pat him on the back, shake his hand, and start planning the celebratory dinner.

"They promoted you?" I questioned, not really believing. "You didn't even notice that your boss lost his marbles. How do they trust you...?"

Dad shushed me and Percy looked at me with pity. "Ginny, you are too young to understand," he said. "Obviously they were impressed with how I handled Crouch's duties in his absence."

Dad looked at Percy with curiosity, trying to figure out what was going on. "You're barely a year out of Hogwarts, son. I don't understand." He scratched his cheek in thought.

Dad hesitated before he said anything else. He was trying to choose his words carefully. "You know how Fudge is. Don't you think he's trying to use you, Percy?" He looked at me for a split second. "To keep an eye on us?"

With each of the words Dad spoke, I watched Percy begin to tremble. When Dad finally spoke the last word of his statement, Percy exploded. "If you weren't doing anything wrong, you wouldn't need someone to spy on you!"

"So you admit it!" Dad shouted, though not as loud as Percy.

"He would never ask me to do such a thing!" Percy hissed.

"You know damn well what Fudge wants!" Dad yelled. I had never heard him swear in front of me. "By accepting this job, you are betraying your family."

"*I'm* betraying the family?" Percy shrieked. As if called, the rest of the family had descended the stairs to hear what the commotion was about. "WHAT ABOUT *YOU*, FATHER? I have worked so hard to overcome your lousy reputation. I can't count the times people have asked me if I was the son of that Muggle-loving Arthur Weasley!"

"PERCY!" Mum screamed. Dad told her to be quiet and let him handle it. For the first time, Mum listened.

"I'm sorry my reputation has been such a hindrance to you," Dad said softly, "but I will not allow you to question my dedication to this family."

"Dedication?" Percy questioned, spit flying out of his mouth. "If you had any dedication to this family, you would have gotten out of your lousy department and you would have made us some money. That's why we've always been poor, Father, isn't it? Because you have no ambition."

Fred and George looked thunderstruck. Ron stood there with his mouth agape. Mum looked as if she was about to cry and kill at the same time.

Dad said nothing as Percy continued to scream. "Have you heard the news that they stripped Dumbledore of his Chief Warlock status and his Order of Merlin? They think he's lost his mind. What do you think of your great Albus Dumbledore now, Father?"

"They are merely trying to discredit him, Percy."

"He discredits himself!" Percy shouted even louder. "He's in trouble. If you continue to associate with him, you will soon be following him."

"Dumbledore is the only person taking action right now!" Dad yelled. "Whatever trouble is happening, it's due to You-Know-Who's return."

"And what proof is there for that?" Percy screamed. "The word of a fourteen year old boy who has been searching for attention ever since the day he stepped into school?"

Without thinking, I stood up and screamed. "You think Harry's lying then?" I hit him hard in the chest. "WHO KILLED CEDRIC?" I would have hit him again if Mum had not restrained me.

Percy backed up. "Ginny, I'm sorry you had to be here for this," he said softly, "but you cannot let your little crush for Harry Potter get in the way of rational thinking."

"I suppose I'm lying as well about the diary?" I screamed. Percy didn't respond. "I just imagined You-Know-Who possessing me? I just imagined him almost *killing* me? What about that, Percy? I suppose I made that all up because of a little *crush* on Harry Potter as well, huh?" I lunged forward but Mum held tight. "You're a coward!" I looked at Percy straight in the eye. "I HATE YOU!"

"Ginny," Dad said to me quietly and it took a great deal of self-control to listen to my father. He turned back to Percy. "Listen to reason, son."

“For once, you listen!” Percy sneered. As he poked himself in the chest, he said, “I know where my loyalties lie. You can become traitors to the Ministry if you want to, but I refuse-”

“We are your *family*, Percy,” Mum whispered, emphasizing each word.

Percy shook his head. “Not anymore.”

Dad straightened his posture. He slowly closed the gap between him and Percy. I expected the worst. Dad studied his son’s face for a few seconds, looking for something, maybe signs of regret, but ultimately did not find them. Then he did the strangest thing. He embraced Percy.

Percy was, of course, caught off guard. His face became contorted with confusion. His hands were rigid at his side. When Dad let go, I saw the tears gleaming in Dad’s eyes. He said in a whisper that barely could be heard, “I want you to leave.”

Percy was packed within the hour.

They always said that Voldemort had been a master at spreading dissention and chaos. As I mentioned before, I had not grasped the full magnitude of the situation. It was at that moment that I knew we were not coming out of this the same.

Grimmauld Place was the worst place I have ever been in. It was dusty, old, mangy, and dangerous. I can’t recall the last place I had been in which so many creatures were living and breeding. On Mum’s orders, it was our job to clean it. Apparently this was the next best thing if we couldn’t be active in the Order’s activities.

It was not an easy house to clean. Muggle-scrubbing would do nothing against that kind of dirt and magic alone was insufficient. Mum bewitched scrub brushes to help add an extra *oomph* to the cleaning. Ron was assigned to clean the windows and the twins handled the floors. I was busy cleaning the stairwell when I heard the front door open.

“I see they have you doing the important jobs.”

I didn't recognize the voice. I dropped my scrub brush and looked behind me. There stood a young woman who couldn't be any older than my brother Charlie. Her face was heart-shaped and her eyes were dark and beautiful. Her hair was what stood out, seeing that it was spiked and an icy shade of blue.

"Hi," I greeted the woman. I had gotten used to seeing new and old faces in this house, especially this day. Bill and Charlie had already arrived, followed by Dumbledore, Kingsley, Mundungus, Lupin, Diggle, and Doge. This was to be the first meeting of the Order of the Phoenix.

"Nymphadora Tonks," the woman said.

What a strange name, I thought. "Nice you to meet you, Nymphadora," I replied. "I'm Ginny."

"Weasley, I'm sure," she said and smiled. "And that will be the last time you call me Nymphadora." She was grinning even wider. "Call me Tonks."

"My real name is Ginevra, but no one calls me that."

"I wish no one would call me Nymphadora," Tonks replied. "Ginevra is a beautiful name but Ginny suits you just as well." Her eyes flashed to the top of my head. "And you have the most stunning red hair!" She frowned slightly. Slowly her short hair began to grow from her head and change from the icy blue to my own crimson colored locks. When it was done, our hair was the same length. "That's better."

"What spell was that?" I wondered, admiring the new hue on top of her head. I was definitely going to have to try that one.

"No spell," Tonks replied. "I'm a Metamorphmagus." She said it as if it were the most normal thing in the world, but her ability was rare. I had read about it. She was able to change her appearance at will though it was limited to mostly human transformations.

The door opened again. Mad-Eye Moody stood in the doorway. It was odd finally seeing the real man when I spent the previous school year being taught by an imposter. I shook the feeling of dread, knowing

that Barty Crouch, Jr. had been given the horrid Dementor's Kiss and he wouldn't be doing much of anything anymore. Tonks backed away from the opening door and knocked over a vase.

"Professor Moody?" I asked worrisome as he used his magical ability to fix the vase.

"I'm just Moody today," he replied. "But I can't say that I ever got around to much teaching inside that box. When's the meeting starting, Tonks?"

Tonks admitted that she didn't know, but I was still curious about something. "I thought you were retired, Profe... Moody."

"And we thought You-Know-Who had, too," he growled. He took off his coat and hung it on the coat rack next to the door. "I'm going to find Dumbledore." He walked off past us and the *thunk thunk* of his wooden leg echoed off the vast hallway.

"Pleasant fellow," Tonks muttered, looking at me and suppressing a laugh. "Why don't you take a break from cleaning and have a cup of tea with me?"

She didn't need to ask a second time. With a look of relief on my face, I warned her about Mrs. Black's portrait and led her to the kitchen. Lupin stood there at the counter sipping cup of tea already.

Lupin's eyes shifted from his cup of tea, to me, and then, with seemingly great interest, to Tonks. He set the teacup on the countertop and smiled. "You must be Nymphadora Tonks. I've heard a lot about you."

Tonks caught my eye for a fraction of a second and then back to Lupin. "I hope you've heard not to call me Nymphadora."

Lupin's usual weary face seemed to regain a bit of youthful energy in the presence of the young woman. He flicked his wand and conjured a second and third cup of tea. "I have heard, as well as your reputation for..." He took the second cup in his hand and offered it to Tonks. She reached for it, but failed to grasp the cup completely. It

plummeted to the floor, spilling the hot liquid all over. Lupin smiled as he continued, "...accidents..."

Tonks blushed. Actually, to be fair, her hair blushed. It turned about one shade darker than she had made it when she imitated my locks. "Stealth has never been my strong point, but..." Her nose morphed into the snout of a pig. "I had top grades in concealment."

Both Lupin and I laughed at the sight of the nose. As she changed it back to the previous state, Tonks smiled mischievously. I offered her my cup of tea, but she declined, and I took my cup and sat down, eagerly awaiting more interaction between the two.

"I have heard things about you, too," Tonks admitted. "It seems you have the ability to... transform as well..." It seemed that the idea of Lupin's *furry little problem* did not strike fear into her, but rather it made him more interesting.

"You've been talking to your cousin," Lupin said, scowling. "Unfortunately, I cannot control how lovely I look when I transform."

There was a silence between the two. Not an awkward one, but one of realization. Tonks looked at him curiously, trying to figure out if that had been a compliment. Lupin looked down at his tea rather sheepishly, hoping that he had not offended the young lady.

The door of the kitchen pushed open. Sirius stood in the frame and smiled warmly at the three of us. Sirius greeted Tonks with an embrace. Tonks looked extremely happy to see her cousin. She was young when Sirius had been sent to Azkaban and from what she's told me in later conversations, she had never been convinced of his guilt.

"By the way, Tonks, Molly is looking for you," Sirius said. She waved goodbye to me, gave an affectionate pat on Sirius' shoulder, and locked eyes with Lupin for a second before she said goodbye to him. In the process, she knocked a chair over. She reminded me of my past experiences with Harry, although she usually was a clumsy person.

Sirius pushed strands of hair away from his eyes. Glancing at me and winking, he lightly slapped the strangely quiet Remus Lupin on the back. "You know, Moony, my cousin *is* single. Nothing would make me happier to have you officially part of my family."

Lupin shook his head as he picked up the chair from the floor. "Love is not a luxury a man like me is able to embrace." He made no eye contact with Sirius.

I spoke up. "Tonks doesn't seem like the type of girl who would care about you being a werewolf." I finally took a sip of my tea and decided Lupin's brew could rival Mum's.

Sirius studied Lupin's rugged face. "You like her," he teased and nudged him, and I thought that this is maybe how they acted when they were still in Hogwarts. "You dog!"

"You forget," Lupin said, finally raising his eyes to meet Sirius. "You're the dog. I'm the wolf," pointing to Sirius and himself respectively. Both men shared a hearty laugh.

Lupin and Tonks shared an immediate connection and their interaction was amusing to watch. Lupin had always looked worn out and aged beyond his years, but Tonks appeared to give him a feeling of renewal. I didn't need to eavesdrop to notice that. They always chose to go on missions together. Although I saw the connection at first, I fell into the notion that Bill and Tonks should be set up with each other. I'll admit though that it was just a reason to rid my life of Fleur.

It was Dumbledore's turn to enter the kitchen. "Remus, Sirius, the meeting is about to begin." He held the door open for the two friends to journey through. Dumbledore pushed his half-moon spectacles up his nose and greeted me. "Good afternoon, Ginny."

He looked like he had been through a lot in the last few weeks. Since Cedric had been murdered, Dumbledore had been advocating for the cause against Voldemort. To any who would listen and even the many that wouldn't, he had been spreading the word. In retaliation, the Ministry was trying their best to discredit him in any way possible.

"Hello, Professor," I replied. I did not know if he would be too busy in the next couple weeks to ask any questions so I figured now was a better time than any. "I need to ask you something. Is now a good time?"

"Of course," Dumbledore said, "but do not forget that I have a meeting to conduct."

I nodded, indicating that it would not take long. "Am I allowed to send letters out?"

"If we are sending letters to Harry, we must not tell him a thing until he is safely here in our protection," Dumbledore answered. "But regrettably, I would advise you to send not send owls out unless absolutely necessary."

"When will we be bringing him here with us?" I asked.

Dumbledore sighed heavily. "I do not know yet," he admitted. "He is safer where he is for the time being."

I knew that Harry would grow restless. Even a few days in the dark was going to drive him crazy. He was itching to know what was going on and maybe even join the fight if they would allow him.

"If that is all, we both are taking time away from important duties," he said, summoning a scrub brush from the hallway. "I have a room full of wizards and witches who may grow restless without the proper attention, and you..." he smiled as he handed me the brush.

"...have the best job in the house?" I asked.

His eyes sparkled. "Precisely." He exited the room.

I strolled out into the hallway a few seconds later. There was no way they were going to have the first meeting without this clever little witch listening in. I stood at the doorway of the dining room straining to hear if the meeting had started yet.

"Shame on you, Ginny," Fred's voice scolded me from behind. Looking down the hallway, he and George stood beside each other,

hands on their hips, and looking at me in mock disappointment. "You were going to try to listen in, weren't you?"

"I *am* your extendable ear, remember?" I reminded the twins. If they were just as curious as I was to know what was going on, they would hush up and allow me to listen.

"Not anymore," George replied. He held up a long, thin, flesh-colored string and grinned. "We've been working on it for some time now."

"We'll meet you upstairs," Fred said as he and George Apparated with a crack.

I debated not following them. If their invention failed to work, then I'd miss the first half of the meeting and I hated being uninformed. Turning around towards the door, I met Tonks, who must have come through it without my knowledge. I swore to myself, knowing that I couldn't cover for this one.

"Sooner, rather than later, I'll bet one of us is going to put the Imperturbable Charm on the meetings," Tonks said casually. "It's fairly easy to detect. Just throw something at the door. If it can't come close, well..." She winked. "But you didn't hear that from me." She opened the door and went back inside.

Something touched my hair and I brushed it away annoyingly. Grasping the mysterious object, I recognized the strings that Fred and George had just shown me. Following the string upwards, I saw it disappear behind the banister. I whispered into the end of the string, "I'll be up in second."

The Ears worked. I should have never doubted. The twins' products, when they labored on them for so long, rarely ever failed to do what the twins promised they would do. So that's how Fred, George, Ron, and I found out much of the information we weren't supposed to know. Even when Hermione came days later, she enjoyed having that kind of knowledge.

And Mum was livid when she first discovered what we were doing. That was the end of eavesdropping. We would have to depend on the

slip-ups of the members when they were talking to each other outside the room.

“Do you think my parents are in danger yet?” Hermione asked me, one late night days before Harry would arrive. I glanced over at her and saw the outline of her body lying there beneath the covers, staring up at the ceiling. I was about to answer, but she answered it herself. “I don’t think so. I doubt You-Know-Who knows who I am.”

“He just came back, Hermione. The Order reckons he’s trying to build up his followers before causing any real chaos,” I said. I grasped for my wand, lit it, and looked at Hermione’s face. Her cheeks were damp and glistening with tears.

“Sooner or later, we’re going to be fighting,” Hermione whispered, looking at me finally. “That’s unavoidable, especially for me since Harry and I are so close.”

“You’d never let him fight alone, I know.”

“What then?”

I swallowed hard. My parents were skilled magic folk and could handle themselves against evil powers. Hermione’s, on the other hand, were Muggles, defenseless against anything magic. If Voldemort wanted to kill them, they weren’t going to be able to stop him. “When the time comes, we’ll think of something,” I answered.

“I’ve been writing to Viktor since school ended,” Hermione said as if I had just asked the question. “He’s a good man, but I told him we had to be only friends.”

I half-smiled. Not even Hermione, the most talented witch at Hogwarts, could mask her feelings. She would never be happy unless it was with Ron. Why do you think she never had a real boyfriend after Krum? “What are you going to do about Ron?”

“The same as I’ve always done,” she said, wiping a tear from her eye. “There are more important things to worry about than him and me. If... if he figures things out, maybe... but...” She trailed off but I

understood her. She pulled the covers up closer to her neck. "Tell me about Michael, Ginny."

There wasn't much to tell yet. I filled her in with what happened on the train, leaving out the part where Harry gave his winnings to the twins. "I like him a lot. I can't wait to really get to know him this term."

"I'm proud of you," Hermione said, her eyes growing heavier with each word.

"Do me a favor though," I said, also growing tired. As I extinguished my wand and put it away, I said, "Don't tell anyone about it yet, especially Ron. He'll make such a scene."

"No worries," she replied, and she yawned. "I won't tell Ron... or Harry."

Good, I thought.

"It'll be easier... talking to... Harry now... that the pressures... off..." and she was asleep.

She was right. Hermione usually is though. When Harry finally came, I felt as if a weight had been lifted. Oh, I couldn't suppress the butterflies in my stomach whenever he looked at me with those eyes and I couldn't help but think how adorable he looked with his messy hair. And I admired his ability to ward off those two dementors and felt sorry for him when he expressed his resentment about being left alone for a month. But I could talk to him, and not just in front of him, but to him. And he talked back.

When the Order filled Harry in the latest involvement, Fred was right. The moment Hermione came to bed that night, she told me everything. I had put up the fight earlier because I didn't want to let on that I would eventually know. If that were the case, I doubt Mum would have allowed the Order tell Harry. If she hadn't followed me upstairs, I would have been listening in anyhow.

We were all worried about Harry's hearing. In any other situation, the wizard in question would have gotten off easily, but nothing was ever that simple with Harry. They had a grudge against him for siding with

Dumbledore and claiming that Voldemort was back. They weren't going to give up Harry without a fight.

While Harry was at his hearing, we were still cleaning. I found my way into a room with cleaning supplies. The first thing that caught my eye was the immense tapestry. At the top of it, large words read "*The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black: Toujours Pur.*" I studied the family tree with fascination, touching places where several burn marks must have replaced names.

"You should be on there," Sirius said from the door. As he walked up beside me, he scanned the picture and pointed towards where he thought I'd be. "We are something like third cousins."

I should have known that we were related. Most pure-blood wizards are. If you want to marry a pure-blood, your choices are very limited. "You're not on here either," I said.

"Well, you and I are broken branches on the family tree," Sirius said, pointing to a burned place beside a deceased wizard by the name of Regulus. "Blood traitors," he said. "Filthy prejudice ideals our relatives have, wouldn't you say?"

"To put it lightly," I replied.

He became distant, remembering perhaps some memory that had happened in this house that plagued him. He turned from the tapestry and looked at me. "I've wanted to tell you since you came here," he started. "You remind me so much of Lily."

Harry's mother. It must have been the red hair. My hand came up to touch my crimson locks and he shook his head. "Not just that," Sirius laughed. "She was just as fiery as you are, just as determined."

"Would I have liked her?"

"There aren't many who didn't," Sirius admitted. "I don't think there was a boy outside Slytherin that didn't fancy the girl at least once in her time at school there. The four of us- James, Remus, me, and..." he hesitated before saying the last name "...*Pettigrew*... all fancied her once at the same time."

I chuckled. Recalling a picture I had seen of her, she was beautiful and it was unmistakable that Harry inherited his amazing eyes from her. "I would have liked to meet her. She sounds lovely."

"She would have adored you, I'm sure," Sirius replied. He sighed heavily and put a hand on the tapestry. His hands were rough, no doubt from all the running from the Ministry he had to do. He found the place where he should have been, outlined it with his hand, and said, "All I kept seeing when I was in Azkaban were her and James that night."

I shuddered, thinking how the dementors caused everyone to relive their worst memories. While I would be back inside the Chamber of Secrets, Sirius would continue to find his two close friends murdered in a destroyed house. "I can only imagine how horrible it was for you, Sirius," I said. "I can't believe you didn't go crazy."

"My innocence kept me sane," he replied. "And soon I learned that they left me alone the most when I was in my Animagus form. I had my break-out planned for years."

Frowning, I asked, "Why did you wait so long then?"

"What reason did I have? The only people who could clear my name were dead," Sirius replied. "Until I saw that mangy rat in the newspaper with your family..." His face clenched at the thought of Pettigrew again. "I would have recognized that filthy rodent anywhere."

I thought about our Egypt vacation and how much fun it had been. It was interesting to think that it inspired a breakout. "I'm glad you're out, Sirius."

"Me, too" he said. He put his hand in the air and motioned around the room, indicating the whole house. "But I'm back inside a different kind of prison. If it weren't for Harry's sake, I wouldn't stay here. I would be out, doing something, anything."

"Harry is lucky to have a godfather like you," I said. "After all he's been through, he deserves the happiness. I think he'd be a mess without you." *And I'd be a mess if Harry were a mess,* I thought.

Sirius smiled and patted me on the shoulder. "Harry is lucky to have a friend like you."

I knew that I had given up on Harry, but another person calling me his friend made it more real. Trying my best to ignore the feeling of sadness, I said softly, "I'll always be his friend."

We heard Mum from downstairs. "Harry's back!" My eyes lit up and I raced from the room, leaving Sirius in my wake. Taking two steps at a time, I had sprinted into the kitchen, just as Fred and George Apparated into the room, and only a few seconds before Ron entered.

Harry stood there with Dad, Mum, and Hermione and by the look on their faces, he had shoved it to the Ministry. To make things official, I asked, "Harry, did you get off?"

"I got off," Harry said, smiling wider than I had seen him smile in days.

"He got off!" Fred shouted and George repeated him.

"He got off!" I yelled back at them, trying to suppress my fit of giggles that I could feel building inside of me. Harry had got off. He wasn't going to be expelled. He wasn't going to have his wand broken. He wasn't going to be away from me...

"I knew it!" Ron shouted as his fist met the air. "You always get away with stuff!"

"They were bound to clear you," Hermione said. "There was no case against you, none at all..."

Fred grabbed me by the shoulder and faced me with his mouth agape. "HE GOT OFF!" we both shouted at each other. He grabbed my wrist and we joined George in the celebratory dance. Chanting the three-worded phrase over and over again, we made our way around the kitchen as the others chatted.

"SHUT UP!" Mum roared at us at last.

I caught Harry's eye and saw him grin, happy that he had evaded expulsion once again, and, maybe, I hoped, amused by the dancing and chanting

Days later, Hermione and I opened our letters from Hogwarts. Glancing over each other's book lists, we found it odd that we had been assigned the same DADA book.

"At least they found a teacher," I said to her. "Fred and George heard that Dumbledore was having a hard time finding one."

"Ron thinks the job is jinxed," Hermione said. "I used to think he was being funny but he might be right." She named off all the teachers she had since her first year, saying that Quirrell actually died teaching it. "Lupin was the only proper one we had."

"Crouch may have been a Death Eater, but he did teach us a lot," I reminded her. "The only thing he did *right* was teach us."

Hermione shuddered at the thought. She grabbed her envelope to throw it away and as she picked it up, something shiny and metallic dropped to the floor and slid to my feet noisily. Hermione and I both stared at it.

Is that...? I thought. It had to be. I would recognize it anywhere since Percy had taken his out every hour on the hour to shine it up. I bent down and admired the superimposed P over the Gryffindor lion. "I forgot they chose Prefects in fifth year," I said, tossing the badge to her.

Hermione caught the symbol in her hands and stared down at it in bewilderment. She opened her mouth a couple times to say something.

"Honestly, Hermione, did you really think you weren't going to get it?"

The squeal started low but rose in volume as the realization became apparent. In no time, she had somehow jumped to the bed and held the badge up, examining it. "I can't believe it!" she gasped. "I bet... I bet Harry got one... Oh, I'm going to go check!" She hit the floor running and was out the door fast.

I rolled my eyes. Only Hermione would be so excited to be made a Prefect... well, maybe Percy, but I had disowned the git and decided that he no longer deserved to be mentioned in my thoughts.

"What was she so excited about?" Mum asked me as she entered my room. She laid some of my clothes on my bed.

"I haven't seen her that excited since she heard there might be a sequel to Hogwarts, A History," I said. Mum looked at me odd and I laughed. "She was made a Prefect, Mum."

"Oh, how exciting!" Mum replied, smiling widely. "With everything going on, I daresay I forgot that fifth year is when they chose the Prefects. I wonder if Ron..."

"Really, Mum?" I asked, trying not to laugh even harder. "Hermione reckons that Harry got the other one."

She looked disappointed, but recovered quickly. "The book lists are in then?" she asked, reaching for the paper on my bed. "I can go straight to Diagon Alley after lunch and pick up everything you kids need." She folded the letters up and took it with her as she exited my room.

"Dumbledore made *you* Prefect?" I asked Ron that afternoon, watching the boys pack their possessions. I glanced at Harry who seemed to be paying far too much attention to his socks.

"Blimey, don't sound too surprised," Ron said, placing his badge on his dresser.

"I mean, c'mon," I playfully said. "It must be true what they're saying about Dumbledore. He must be off his rocker to trust you."

"Shove off, Ginny," he hissed, throwing a pillow at me.

I moved my head gently to the right and left the object fly past me. I glanced over at Harry again and he was still folding his socks. Something was up with him and I decided to give my newfound ability to talk to him a go. Now what to do with Ron? "Ron, are you hungry as I am?"

Ron stopped stuffing his books into his trunk. "You're reading my mind." He rubbed his stomach affectionately. "I could go for a snack. What do you want, Ginny? I'll get us something from the kitchen."

I made a fake noise of consideration. "Nevermind, I'll wait for dinner."

"Harry, fancy some chocolate?" Ron asked.

"Hmm?" Harry asked, not turning around. "I don't know, Ron." As Harry's attention was still on that particular article of clothing, Ron shrugged and left the room in search of culinary treats able to appease the hunger.

I studied Harry for a moment. "Either you really like your socks, Harry, or something's on your mind."

Harry dropped the socks into his bag and turned to face me. This night, if I remember correctly, have been the first time we had ever shared the same room together alone and both conscious since the Chamber of Secrets. I felt oddly comfortable and wondered if he felt the same way. "Nothing's on my mind. I'm just worried..." his voice trailed off.

"Harry, we're all worried bout You-Know-Who," I said.

He shrugged in response. For a fraction of a second, his eyes focused on the Prefect badge that Ron had placed on the dresser and I caught on to what he was thinking.

"I'm sure Dumbledore has his reasons for not making you a Prefect," I said casually, and I checked his face for a reaction. Yes, as I suspected, his face twitched slightly. I had found the culprit of his mood. "When's the last time Dumbledore led you astray?"

"Er," he said. He wrestled with something in his head, as if he was struggling with whether or not to confide in me. I could be patient. I had, after all, waited years to be able to actually talk with him normally like this. When he was ready to talk about the things that bothered him, I would listen.

"I can see you'd rather keep it all bottled up," I said.

I stood up and left the room, bumping into Hermione. She looked at me curiously. "All packed?" I asked, trying to avoid her gaze.

When we were out of earshot of the room, she scolded me. "I thought you were over Harry."

"I am," I replied.

"What are you doing alone with him?" Hermione asked. "I doubt Michael would find that innocent."

"It *was* innocent," I reassured her. I know she was only looking out for me, but I didn't need her to. "You've been too busy to notice that Harry isn't thrilled that he wasn't chosen as Prefect. I was just making sure he was okay. I'm *not* trying to seduce him."

Hermione looked skeptical. "You have a boyfriend now, Ginny..." And I stopped listening to her. I may have been taken but that didn't mean I couldn't be friendly towards Harry or try to cheer the kid up.

"Wotcher, girls." The familiar greeting of Tonks found us as we entered the kitchen. I was happy to see her. Since her stay at Grimmauld, Hermione and I had grown closer with her. She would stay up late with us and talk about anything we wanted. The only off-limit topics were Order business and my crush on Harry.

Ron had grabbed a couple chocolate frogs and left the room without as much as a goodbye.

"What's up?" Tonks asked. "You should be excited. You're going to school soon."

"Hermione is accusing me of adultery," I said, grinning at my friend to let her know that no hard feelings were felt.

Tonks cocked her head to the side a bit and gave us both a questioning look. Hermione made a noise of annoyance. "Ginny fancies Harry, Tonks," she started.

"I *used* to fancy Harry," I interrupted.

“...and she’s dating Michael.” Hermione looked at me and back to Tonks. “She’s still trying to catch Harry’s eye...”

“I’m trying to catch his eye in a friendly way...”

“...And I don’t think she should be trying to seduce him when she has a boyfriend...”

“HEY! Can’t I seduce him as a friend would?”

Tonks laughed, but I was becoming upset with Hermione. I was trying my best to get over Harry, but with these constant reminders, it was becoming increasingly difficult.

“So you fancy Harry, do you?” Tonks asked. We had talked about Michael a lot and I had tried to keep the conversations as far away as possible from the subject of Harry and my unrequited love.

“No,” I lied.

Hermione gave me a knowing look. If I convinced enough people of it, maybe I could convince myself. Hermione nodded. I smacked her arm. How could I achieve my goal with that kind of attitude?

Sighing, I nodded half-heartedly to Tonks. “Maybe... but just a little... I’m trying not to... because Michael...”

“I understand,” Tonks said. She gave us both hugs and left the room, leaving me there alone with Hermione.

I gave Hermione an annoyed look. “If I am ever going to get over Harry, you need to stop telling people I fancy him,” I said to her.

“Are you telling me that you wouldn’t break up with Michael if...?”

I placed my hand over her mouth to shut her up. Did she really have that kind of faith in me? “Don’t even say it!” I hissed at her. “I am Michael’s girlfriend. If Harry stopped being blind long enough to notice me, I would tell him it was too late.”

Hermione stared at me in disbelief. “If that’s what you want...”

"I do."

"...then we can pretend you're over Harry."

"I *am* over Harry!" I growled. I turned away from her, whipping my hair around my shoulder in the process. I stormed off towards the door and pounded my fist against it, swinging it open. Mrs. Black began shouting at me as I stomped up the stairs.

I collapsed into my bed and beat my fists into the pillow three times. I hated being angry with her, especially since we had always gotten along so well. I let out a big sigh and lay there staring up at the ceiling.

Hermione entered a few minutes later. She walked slowly to my bed, sat down beside me, and said, "I'm sorry, Ginny."

I mumbled something that she couldn't hear and I don't want to repeat.

"I trust you," she said, placing her hand on my shoulder. "From here on out, you are over Harry Potter."

I accepted her apology and embraced my best friend.

When Ron and Hermione were forced to do their Prefect duties the next day on the train, Harry looked so lost without them. I should have gone to find Michael but I couldn't let Harry wander around by himself and I didn't enjoy the idea of Harry sitting in the same compartment with Michael.

"Come on," I said to Harry. "If we get a move on we'll be able to save them places." I was tempted to take him by the hand and lead him somewhere, but I resisted temptation. After all, this was not about wanting to sit with Harry on the train, this was about helping out a friend... or at least that's what I told myself.

Watching the boys with Luna was well worth skipping out with Michael. And I didn't even feel like hexing Cho when she stopped in to see Harry. Although Ron's reaction to Luna was priceless, Hermione's was even better. They are the complete opposite of each other.

When we arrived in the Great Hall, I spotted Delia and Ethan near the far end of the Gryffindor table. She waved for me to join her and I left the others. Finding my seat next to my roommate, I greeted her. "I thought you weren't coming back this year," I said to her.

"Mum and I went to the Ministry and spoke to some people," Delia said. "They assured us that nothing was wrong."

I stared at her in disbelief. "And you believed that?"

"Well, no one really knows what happened..."

"Harry knows!" I snarled. "He was there."

"Ginny," Delia said, trying to calm me. "I don't know what to believe. Things are so different here."

"Did you see that Hagrid isn't here yet?" Ethan said, noticing my growing annoyance and attempting to change the subject. He pointed towards the teacher's table. "Grubbly-Plank is in his place."

"I saw," I replied. I knew that Hagrid had some kind of job to do for the Order, but I hadn't thought it would take him all summer. Since the information was top secret, I couldn't say reveal what I knew.

"I prefer Grubbly-Plank to Hagrid," Delia said, looking at her fingers. One of Hagrid's creatures had burned her badly last term.

I shot her an annoyed look. "I hope he gets back soon."

"His classes were always fun," Ethan said, defending me. He at least favored Hagrid, even if it was for the sheer excitement of the lessons.

"So," Delia began, "did *Harry Potter* stay with you this summer?" She had whispered his name. I caught Ethan rolling his eyes.

I glanced over my shoulder, attempting to locate Michael. "Something like that," I said, a little less annoyed, "but you know I'm dating Michael Corner now, right?"

Delia squealed and made three people behind her jump. She took me by the hand and asked for a full report of our relationship, down to the every little detail.

“Is that why he was looking for you?” Ethan asked before I was able to respond to Delia.

“Was he?” I asked. I stood up eagerly looking for my boyfriend. I spotted him finally sitting with Terry Boot and Anthony Goldstein. Making sure that the Sorting hadn’t begun, I rushed over to the Ravenclaw table.

I took the empty seat next to him and hugged him hard. “Michael!” I greeted.

He smiled wide and embraced me back. “I was beginning to think you forgot about me,” he said.

“Forget you?” I said, kissing him on the cheek. “I couldn’t forget the handsomest bloke in Hogwarts.”

“Where were you on the train?” he asked.

“Ron and Hermione were made Prefects and Harry looked lost. I felt bad leaving him all alone,” I said casually and Michael looked satisfied with the answer. I turned to Anthony. “You’re a Prefect, too, aren’t you?”

He pointed to the blue and bronze badge with the superimposed P over an eagle. “My parents were very proud of me.”

From behind me, I heard a snuffle. Rotating in my seat, I met Cho’s reddened eyes. She had obviously been crying. Noting that I did not want to hex her again, I acknowledged her presence with a welcoming smile, then realizing that I must have been in her seat. “Did I take your place, Cho?”

“I don’t mind,” she said softly. “You wanted to see your boyfriend.” She said the last word with the slightest hesitation. I understood. Any sign of relationship bliss must have reminded her of Cedric.

I turned back to Michael, kissed him on the cheek again, and said, "I'll catch up with you later. Sorting is about to start."

I stood up and allowed Cho to take her seat again. Her friend that I would later know as Marietta Edgecombe took Cho by the hand and gave it a comforting squeeze.

The Sorting Hat's new song was well on its way by the time I joined Ethan and Delia. I had heard most of it and pondered the meaning of the warning it had given us. *Stand united*, it said. I saw Harper and Vaisey out of the corner of my eye and thought it wasn't likely.

After dinner, Dumbledore said his usual words about the Forbidden Forest, Filch's requests, new teachers, and the Quidditch practices. My mind wandered to Zacharias Smith taunting me about not being on the Quidditch team and I wondered if I would be allowed to try out with a school broom. Would I even be able to impress Angelina with a poor broom like that?

After that horrible Umbridge cow said her two sickles, I joined the rest of my peers as we went back to our common rooms. Worried about being rejected from the Quidditch team, I found Neville walking up beside me.

"Can you believe the Ministry?" Neville asked me. I cringed when his plant teetered dangerously towards me. Only a few short hours ago, the plant had covered me in slime. I wasn't looking forward to a repeat. "I didn't understand a word that Umbridge lady said, but I overheard Hermione. She reckons the Ministry is interfering here."

"I don't know how she sat through that and listened," I replied. I had almost sent a spell in Ron's direction just to recover from the boredom.

"You know Hermione," Neville said. He held his plant up and smiled. "She also passed the new password along to me."

"Really?" I questioned since Neville wasn't exactly the best at remembering them. He had wrote them all down in his third year and it was his fault that Sirius got into our tower, not that it was a big deal

seeing that Sirius was innocent, but it gave us all a scare nevertheless.

"I'll remember it for sure this time," he said, grinning. "*Mimbulus Mimbletonia!*" he exclaimed.

I couldn't help but feel happy for him. "Looks like Harry could use it," I said, pointing up the stairs towards the entrance of our dormitory. He was standing there obviously clueless as the Fat Lady refused to let him in.

"Right," Neville said, sprinting towards the scene. "Harry!" he called. "I know it!" He knocked over a Second Year in his mad dash to assist Harry.

As soon as Neville left my side, Ron and Hermione took his place. I looked from one to the other. "Hello. Going my way?" I breathed hard into my hand and pretended to shine up Ron's Prefect badge. "Unless you're too busy being responsible, dear brother."

"Being responsible is easier than I thought," Ron replied. "All I have to do is boss people around. It's loads of fun."

"Ron," Hermione said crossly as he stopped before the entrance, waiting for a couple First Years to stop fooling around and move through. "It's not about bossing people around. It's about guiding your fellow students. Honestly, Ron."

"Hey!" Ron shouted, ignoring her remark, and turning his attention to the First Years that had not moved yet. "Get a move on or I'll take points from you!" He chased the eleven-year-old students through the entrance. Even Hermione had to smile at that.

"Maybe they were blocking the entrance because they saw a Crumple-Horned Snorkack," I said to Hermione as we walked through the portrait hole. I checked her face for her reaction.

"A what?"

"It's something Luna always talks about."

"Luna Lovegood?" Hermione replied. She held up her hands in disbelief and let them fall to her side again. "I don't understand her."

"She's harmless," I reassured her. I explained how you just had to let Luna be herself and let her believe what she wanted.

"But she's in *Ravenclaw*," Hermione retorted, as if that settled the matter.

I said goodnight to Hermione and slept peacefully in my bed that night, dreaming of the look on Harry's face when I became the newest member of the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

"I think you should have no problem getting on," Michael said to me a few minutes before class days later. He had walked me to class since his next one was close by. It was going to be my first period with Umbridge and, after what Hermione had told me, I was not looking forward to it.

"You haven't even seen me fly," I teased. I tightened my grip on his hand and gave him a scowl to further my case of playful harassment

"I guess not," Michael replied, "but I know you can be the best in whatever you do."

No lighthearted remarks. No good-natured grin. It was almost as if he was afraid to hurt my feelings. And his remark '*I know you can be the best in whatever you do*' annoyed me. He didn't even know me yet. He didn't know if I could be the best. I disregarded the actions. Maybe he was nervous.

"Is Umbridge really that horrid?" I asked, hoping to get some kind of fun banter back and forth between us.

"She is a monster," he whispered, looking around nervously to make sure she was not listening. "The worst, maybe even worse than Snape."

I was not looking forward to this class. I glanced over Michael's shoulder as Cho passed by with a tissue in her hand. "I feel so bad for Cho," I said honestly.

Michael turned to see the girl walk by. "She's always crying, Ginny. I just wish there was something I could do to help her," he said. "I was the one who introduced her and Cedric."

"And I'm sure she doesn't regret it," I told him.

"Marietta means well, but I don't think she's any help," Michael said. "Are you any good with that kind of stuff? Maybe you could talk to her."

I had no ill feelings towards Cho anymore, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to hold a real conversation with the girl or become friends with her. "I don't know," I said simply. "We'll see. Maybe she'll start being cheerful again."

"I saw her cheerful once so far this week," he said. "It was when she had talked to Harry."

Hmm... no internal turmoil. No desire to rip the girl's hair out. I supposed that was what it felt like to be okay with Cho and Harry. Satisfied with myself, I gave Michael a quick kiss on the lips, walked into the DADA classroom, and took my seat beside Delia and Luna.

Before Delia could ask me any juicy questions, Umbridge strolled into the classroom and greeted us in a nicer-than-needed welcome. "Good morning, children."

"Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge," most of the class chanted.

I rolled my eyes. They must have heeded the warnings of the older students. The toad-like woman leaned down in front of me. "Why, dear child, did you not join in with your friends to welcome me?"

"I didn't know it was required," I said. Though it sickened me to look into those detestable pupils, I refused to break eye contact with her.

"Of course it is required," she said sweetly. She laughed in a way that sounded forced. "Now that you know, please greet me properly."

I bit my lip hard. I considered not saying it, but Delia nudged me. I gave in and greeted her, but I refused to do it with the enthusiasm she desired.

“Excellent!” she said. She turned from my seat and proceeded to the blackboard. “Wands away and quills out!” She pulled her short wand from her handbag and tapped the blackboard. The words ‘Defense Against the Dark Arts: A Return to Basic Principles’ appeared.

“This classroom has seen many teachers,” Umbridge said. “You have been students of only three of the countless professors that have walked through this door. If you were in your fifth year, we might have to worry about being far behind for your OWL exams, but,” she smiled, “I am here to rectify these problems.

“Under this carefully-structured, theory-centered, Ministry-approved course of defensive magic, you will finally have the class you have always wanted and, most importantly, needed.”

She tapped the blackboard again. “Copy this into your notes, please.” The first message vanished and was replaced by:

Course

Aims:

- 1. Understanding the principles underlying defensive magic.*
- 2. Learning to recognize in which defensive magic can legally be used.*
- 3. Placing the use of defensive magic in a context for practical use.*

Hermione had told me about this part of the lesson. I didn’t expect for Umbridge to teach the *exact* same thing. I dipped my quill and started to copy the information onto my parchment, but then Umbridge spoke again.

“A few students felt it necessary to criticize the Ministry approved course aims yesterday,” Umbridge said.

A few students? How about the whole fifth year Defense Against the Dark Arts class? Hermione had been brilliant, saying that there was nothing about using defensive spells. Recalling when she had retold the tale, I started smiling wider and wider with each thought.

She stood in front of me again, eyes narrowly looking at me. "What is your name?" She asked, obviously annoyed.

"Ginny Weasley," I said, still refusing to break the eye contact.

"Arthur Weasley's daughter?" she asked and I nodded. "I should have expected nothing less." She smiled again and I wanted to punch her in the face. "Miss Weasley, may I ask why you are smiling?"

When I entered this classroom, I had not intended to make a scene. Honestly, I was fully prepared to bite my tongue and enjoy, if possible, the lesson. But she had started it, and it wasn't in my nature to back down from a fight. "With all due respect, Professor, I happen to agree with the student in question. I think we should learn to use defensive spells in addition to learning them."

There was a murmur throughout the classroom and agreement from my peers. Umbridge scanned the students and gave me a chance to blink. "Silence, please," she said.

"We're not using magic?" Delia asked her.

"If you wish to speak, you must raise your hand," Umbridge commanded, her smile growing increasingly wider. "But no, we will not be using magic. I'm sure you do not expect to be attacked in this classroom. We will learn the magic and that should suffice."

"Suffice for what?" I spit out. "In case you forget, a Death Eater taught us last year."

"Hand, Miss Weasley!" she sang.

Reminding myself of Hermione, I threw my hand above me head. Looking left, Luna also had her hand raised.

"Miss...?" Umbridge asked. Luna answered and Umbridge finished, saying, "...Lovegood?"

"We were in danger all of last year because a Death Eater was teaching us," she said, mirroring my words. "Wouldn't that be a good reason to use magic in the classroom?"

“Bartemius Crouch, Jr. was a disturbed individual who imagined himself a follower of a dark wizard that died over a decade ago,” Umbridge said, looking from student to student. Seeing a few of our skeptical faces, she added, “I see that Mr. Potter has been spreading his lies to everyone else.”

“LIES?” I shouted. Delia put her hand on my arm and I wrenched free of it. I shook with anger and hatred for this vile woman. Somehow, Voldemort had returned. How? I didn’t know, but he found a way to do it. I was proof for it. I was sure that if he had succeeded in possessing me, he would have returned two years earlier than he had.

“I did not see your hand, Miss Weasley.” Umbridge gave me that smile again. “And yes, lies. No dark wizard has returned from the dead. No Death Eaters are running loose. The only dangerous things right now are Harry Potter’s lies.”

“Harry is *NOT* a liar!” I hissed. “*You’re* the liar!”

“Detention, Miss Weasley. And if you speak again out of turn, you will not be seeing any free time this school year.”

I shook with uncontrollable anger, using every ounce of will power to shut myself up. Professor McGonagall had scolded Harry and she would do the same with me. I bit my lip again as hard as I could, tasted blood, and then said, “Yes, Professor.”

“Friday night, 5:30.”

My heart sunk. That was a half hour after Quidditch tryouts started. I wasn’t going to be able to audition. How I hated this woman! How I despised this vile monster!

I knocked on her door that Friday a few minutes before 5:30. She opened the door and I saw Harry sitting there writing and sneaking glances out the window. I heard the faint sound of Angelina commanding the Quidditch tryouts. Umbridge exited the room quickly and shut the door behind her.

“Thank you for being early, Miss Weasley,” she said. She waited for a response, but when it became clear that I wasn’t offering one, she

continued. "I am sorry that we got off to such a bad start. I want you to know that I want to be your friend..."

I gagged.

"...but," she paused for effect, "if you continue to spread Mr. Potter's lies, I will be forced to take drastic measures."

I stared at her.

"Allow me to explain." Her mouth twitched in a sadistic smile. "You will not interrupt my class like that again, or I might have to let slip some information that you may not want revealed to your peers."

What was this? What information did she have that could possibly make me keep my mouth shut in her class? I laughed inside and invited her to throw the first punch.

"In your first year at Hogwarts, there were several... *accidents*. The person at fault was pardoned completely." Her eyes narrowed at me when she said person.

My eyes widened. Did she know that I had opened the Chamber? How did she...? There could be no way she knew...

"It would be a shame if that knowledge became public."

I don't cry over much, but the tears were searing my eyes, begging to escape. *Who had...?* And then it hit me. *Percy*. My family, including Percy, was aware of the events. I didn't know if Percy had purposely informed Umbridge, but there could be other way the monster could have found out. Refusing to cry in front of her, I stared at her with hate.

"Seeing that I already have one student in detention, you will accompany Filch tonight and polish all the suits of armor on the first floor. You will not use magic and I don't care how long it takes." Umbridge looked satisfied with herself. "You are excused."

I walked away. When I finally heard the door shut, I wept.

The next morning, I sat with Hermione in her room after breakfast. She was working on homework. I decided to let her know what had happened last night. When I told her, she cried out in horror.

“That cow!” She muttered, closing the book she was reading. “How did she find out?”

“It must have been Percy,” I said and she gasped again. “As big a prat as he is, I don’t think he would purposely make me look bad.”

“You should go to Dumbledore,” she suggested.

“No,” I replied. “I’ll just be quiet from now on.”

She gave me the look, questioning my ability to sit idly by while lies were being spread. She played with her quill in her hand. “She’s a foul woman.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “We should do something about her.” I expected her to retort and explain that we couldn’t do anything to a teacher, but she sat there silently. “What are you thinking, Hermione?”

“I was thinking you’re right.”

I did a double-take. “What do you mean?” I asked.

“I don’t know yet,” Hermione said quietly. “I think we need to learn it ourselves, behind Umbridge’s back... I just... have to prepare myself for that kind of rebellion.”

Over the years, Hermione had found some real guts. I was proud. “Do you think you’d be able to teach us?” I asked.

“Actually, I thought Harry might do it.”

I nodded, knowing that she’d eventually get there, even if it took her awhile to accept what needed to be done. While we were on the subject, I asked, “Where *is* Harry?” She gave me an accusatory look and I held up my hands in defense. “I just want to know how the Quidditch tryouts went.”

"He's probably still asleep," she replied. "I had forgotten you came in so late last night." Hermione named off the team and her eyes shone with pride as she said my brother's name.

"Ron's the Keeper?" I questioned.

"He needs work," Hermione answered, but in her eyes, he was perfect. She opened her book back up and continued to read.

I took that as my cue to leave. After all, I wanted to find Michael and spend the day with him. As I entered the common room, I caught a glimpse of Harry exiting the portrait hole with an envelope in his hands. As I pondered who he'd be writing to so early in the morning, I wandered through the hallways to find my boyfriend when I saw a weepy Ravenclaw exiting the girls' bathroom.

Cho looked up from her tissue to see me staring at her. "Hi, Ginny," she greeted, sniffing. "Michael's looking for you. I think he went outside to see if you were around the grounds."

"Thanks, Cho," I said. "How was your first week back?"

"Hard," she admitted. "I miss him so much."

I sighed internally. I was about to start counseling to my rival... *ahem*, sorry, my *former* rival. She was no longer my competition. She was the girl who could make Harry's inside turn with an anxious twist and make him smile. If she was what Harry was looking for, I wasn't about to stand in the way of that.

"You know, Cho, I think Harry was headed to the Owlery. You might be able to catch him," I said with ease. *No hard feelings*, I noticed.

She half-smiled. "But..." she sniffed and wiped her nose with her tissue. "I don't have a reason to go up there."

As if fancying the bloke wasn't reason enough? "Well, if you're worried about that," I said, "I think your mother's birthday was today."

Cho looked at me curiously and after a second or two, it dawned on her what I meant. She thanked me, *hugged* me, and left my company.

That was the beginning of my unlikely friendship with Cho Chang. I never really thought much of the girl, but she was a human with feelings, too. She had lost her boyfriend and I didn't have the heart to direct negative emotions towards her. Besides, I was over Harry and had my own boyfriend to be happy with, right?

"There you are, Ginny!"

I found myself in the arms of Michael Corner, who had finally found me. I smiled at him affectionately and allowed myself to be lost in the eyes of that boy. He was so handsome, I noted again. "I was just looking for you," I told him.

"How was detention?" he asked.

I couldn't tell him what Umbridge had threatened me with. When I informed him of the armor polishing, he replied, "That doesn't sound so bad."

I shrugged. "I hate her with a passion, Michael." My eyes lit up when I remembered Hermione's proposal. "Hermione and I were talking about practicing the Defense Against the Dark Arts by ourselves. What do you think?"

"I bet she wants to pass her OWLS, too."

I slapped his arm playfully. "It's not like that," I said. "But if you're not interested, I suppose I'll just have to practice all by my lonesome." I batted my eyes at him flirtatiously.

Michael frowned. "Let's spend the day together and not talk about anything Umbridge related." He took me by the hand and I followed him outside, a bit annoyed that the boy didn't seem as enthusiastic as I was about the idea.

Despite my annoyance, Michael and I had a pleasant day, kissing, learning more about the other, and when he walked me to the portrait hole, the Fat Lady yawned. "He's a handsome thing," she whispered as I passed by her.

I knew he was, but even after the wonderful day with Michael, there was only one thing on my mind, and it wasn't Harry... it was Umbridge...

Something needs to be done and done, and fast.

Author's Note:

Despite Ginny's reaction to Umbridge being similar to Harry's, I feel I have portrayed an accurate response of our youngest Weasley. I highly doubt Ginny would have been able to sit quietly by when lies were being told about Voldemort when she herself had experienced his dark magic nor do I think she would have been able to stand someone calling Harry a liar.

Chapter Eight: We, Dumbledore's Army

I quickly learned that all Michael really had going for him was his looks. Don't get me wrong, he was a nice bloke and he treated me just fine, but once you get past those deep green eyes, chiseled features, and handsome attributes, there was little else to be enamored with.

It was apparent that Michael was all about first impressions. He was charming when I met him, but when he continued to think he had to charm me with the same lines, it got old really fast. I like being complimented, but when he said the words, it felt like we were meeting for the first time and he was trying to win my heart again.

It was clear from the beginning that Michael didn't view me as his equal. He refused to tease me and he refused to playfully bicker back and forth. He never let me fight my own battles. When Harper picked a verbal confrontation, Michael stood between us. When Zacharias taunted me about Quidditch, Michael argued for me. To him, I was a defenseless, little witch who needed a savior. I only needed a hero once in my life and I didn't want another one.

It also came to my attention that Michael had grown very fond of Cho Chang. It bothered me very little most of the time, because I myself was fond of another person, and as long as the attraction remained innocent as mine was remaining, I was perfectly okay with it. If he wanted to comfort her, that was fine, because I also wanted to comfort Harry. I trusted them both *mostly* because I trusted myself.

I soon learned that Michael annoyed me more than I was attracted to him. I kept picking out flaws at every chance I got and complained about him to Hermione more often than I praised him. With all his faults, I quickly discovered that the most significant flaw that I found in Michael was something he had no control over... *He wasn't Harry.*

I ignored that last detail as much as I could, but there it was, always in the back of my mind, whether or not I chose to acknowledge it. No matter how much I complained to my friends, I also reassured them that I really liked Michael. I convinced myself that he was perfect for me.

Umbridge's reign of terror had not subsided during our first month of school. Harry had finally agreed that something needed to be done. Hermione and I worked through the student body, picking out the people we trusted and choosing the people we knew wanted to act as much as we did. That did not include my roommate Delia Regal, who seemed content that no magic was being used in the classroom, nor did it include Ethan Taylor, who wasn't keen on the idea.

Naturally, I convinced Michael and his friends to come. While Terry and Anthony were ecstatic about the idea, it took all my persuasive expertise to convince Michael that it is was a good idea. If he didn't have to worry about me, I assumed that he'd be all for it.

I was so delighted of my newfound tolerance for Cho that I sought her out. I had avoided talking to her about the meeting since she was always with that horrid Marietta, but since the first weekend in October was coming fast, I did not see any other choice.

"Cho, you have a minute?" I asked her.

Her dark eyes caught mine and I took her hesitation as a chance to look at her face. Her skin had no blemishes except below her eyes where it looked like she had faced many sleepless nights. Her black hair was something to be envied. I noted that she really *was* a good looking girl. I could understand why Harry fancied her so much.

"Sure, Ginny," she said finally.

"Harry wants to teach us," I said cryptically. My head swiveled left and right, checking over my shoulders for any listeners. The mention of Harry had already persuaded her and she didn't need to even hear the rest of my proposal.

"Teach?" Cho asked just for curiosity sake.

"Defense Against the Dark Arts," I answered. The last few weeks of Umbridge's classes had been just as frivolous as the first day. If Cho's class had been anything like mine, she should be just as eager. "Behind Umbridge's back," I finished.

"We can't," Marietta said before Cho had a chance to speak. Marietta and Cho exchanged looks of disagreement. "We're going to get in so much trouble," she hissed at Cho.

Even before she opened her mouth, that girl annoyed me. Now that I had heard her speak, my opinion of her had not changed. "Marietta, I think Cho can make this decision by herself. If *you* don't want to come, I won't lose sleep over it."

Marietta looked like I had *hit* her. Her face cringed and she looked at Cho, fully expecting her fellow Ravenclaw to support her. When she didn't, she folded her arms and made an overly loud annoyed grunt.

"First weekend in October at the Hog's Head," I said, "and keep it to yourselves. It wouldn't be a good idea to have this spread around."

Cho thanked me and walked off with Marietta. I heard the latter start complaining that her mother worked at the Ministry and she couldn't possibly participate. I hoped beyond hope Marietta wouldn't come. She never set well with me.

Sitting down for lunch later, I waited for Michael to join me. I was spreading butter onto my roll when Colin sat down beside me. Looking up from my bread, I greeted him with a large smile. "Hey, Colin. Care to join me and Michael for lunch?"

"No, thanks," he said and I wondered if the boy still fancied me. I noted that he may have grown only a bit taller, but he still looked the same Colin that had kissed me in the Common Room. Nervously, he whispered, "Hermione told me about the meeting."

"Are you coming?" I asked hopefully. I knew that Colin was on Hermione's list of students to ask. I was happy to be learning that more and more of my peers were just as thrilled about the idea as we were.

Colin nodded. "Isn't it exciting? Harry teaching us! Wow!" He stopped himself since he was beginning to grow in volume. "But there's a problem. Dennis wants to come."

Dennis, his little brother, was almost as energetic as Colin was. I had never talked to Dennis much but I had heard about him. He had a lot of potential for only being in his second year. "That's great, Colin, but I don't understand the problem."

"He's only a Second Year."

I didn't comprehend until I remembered where we were meeting: Hogsmeade. No one under the third year was allowed in the wizarding village. I recalled seeing a secret passage leading into the town when I first studied the Marauder's Map. I chuckled. "Colin, that is *not* a problem. Do you remember who my brothers are?"

"Yeah."

"Go talk to Fred and George. They'll help you out." Colin thanked me and took off searching for the twins. I was sure they had memorized where all the secret passageways were. Satisfied with myself, I took a bite of a carrot.

"There's my beautiful girlfriend," Michael said from behind me. His strong arms wrapped around me. I looked up and he kissed me. "What's for lunch?"

I stuck the carrot I had been munching on into his mouth. "Delicious vegetables!" I giggled. I took his hands and pulled him into the seat next to me. "Is it good?"

"I was never into vegetables," he said. As he turned towards his plate, a sandwich and a pickle materialized in front of him. "What did Colin want?" he asked, picking up one half of the sandwich.

"He and Dennis are coming to the meeting," I replied.

"I talked to Cho," Michael said, between bites. "She and Marietta are definitely coming."

I cringed when I heard that the latter was showing up. "I never doubted Cho," I admitted, "but I'm not looking forward to Marietta being there."

“She’ll grow on you,” Michael suggested.

The meeting at the Hog’s Head was an instant success. Harry and Hermione led the group like real leaders. Everyone decided that it was something they wanted to do. After we all signed Hermione’s genius bewitched list, we departed.

“He’s noticing you,” Hermione said casually later that night in her dorm. She moved her quill across a piece of parchment without looking up at me.

I obviously knew who she was talking about, but I decided to play along, just for the sake of a good laugh later on. “Who?”

“Harry,” she replied, crossing a couple *t*’s in whatever she was writing. She placed the quill on the parchment and finally looked up at me. “He was wondering why you were talking more in front of him.”

I wasn’t sure what Hermione wanted me to say. Did she really expect me to love the news that the boy I once openly fancied was noticing me after I had found a boyfriend? I didn’t bother to ask anything else.

“He’s still infatuated with Cho, of course,” she said, picking up her quill and turning it over in her hand. “By the way, I told Ron about you and Michael.”

I had asked her to mention it whenever she found a chance. “And?”

“Just as you expected.”

When the first real meeting of our rebellion, we unanimously voted Harry as our leader. After I suggested Dumbledore’s Army for our name, I was happy that everyone liked that idea.

Most of the meeting went well, but Michael refused to properly duel with me. Before leaving the room that night, I took Michael aside. “Michael, I would appreciate next time if you actually *tried*.” Michael looked sheepishly to his feet. I took his chin between my index finger and thumb and tilted his face towards me. “I’m serious.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

"That's sweet, Michael, but I'm not going to break. I might be small, but I am by no means fragile." I placed the palm of my hands against his chest and felt the outline of his pectoral muscles. I had to stop myself from losing focus. "Understand?"

"I do and I'm sorry."

The chorus of "Weasley is our King" still echoes in my ear every now and then. That is, the altered version that the Gryffindors reinvented months after the original was sung. The negative version rung loud and clear during Gryffindor vs. Slytherin. Delia and I watched with great distress. I couldn't help but think it could have been me out there with Ron, Harry, and the twins.

Michael and I were ecstatic that Gryffindor won. Beneath the stands, we journeyed out to celebrate with the team. From the shadows, Vaisey stepped out, holding up one of the badges that the Slytherins had made in *honor* of my brother. "Don't get too big of a head, Weasley. The song was not made for you."

I immediately grasped my wand, but Michael grabbed it from me, not wanting me to use it. I stared at him in disbelief.

"Beat it, Vaisey!" Michael shouted. "I don't want to have to hurt you."

Maybe a normal girl would have loved her boyfriend stepping between her and confrontation, but I was not one of those girls. I stood there seething.

"I see you've lost your nerve, Weasley!" Vaisey laughed. "Can't fight your own battles now that you're in love?"

"Don't make me hex you, Vaisey!" I shouted, trying to come up beside Michael, but he pushed me back lightly. "I'm in a rather good mood," I said, but that truth was slowly diminishing since Michael wouldn't let me near. "In case you didn't notice, my house just beat your house."

Vaisey sneered and tossed the badge into the air. "No thanks to your brother. With his lack of talent, I might think he *bought* his way onto the team, but where would your father find the money?"

"I said beat it!" Michael shouted, pointing my wand at him.

"*Give me my wand now,*" I hissed to Michael out of the corner of my mouth. He didn't move. I locked eyes with Vaisey and lowered my eyebrows in fury. "There are more important things in life than money. I would expect someone with the size of head you have to know that."

"Like what?" he mocked. "Hanging out with Regal's kind?" He laughed loudly. "A Mudblood, Weasley...?"

That was enough. Instead of grasping for my wand, I plunged my hand into Michael's pocket and hastily extracted his. I shoved my boyfriend out of the way and pointed the wand at Vaisey. "*Chiroptera!*" I shouted before he even had a chance to reach his wand. My beloved bats attacked his face as he beat them away. His screams echoed as he ran from the stands.

Michael quickly held out my wand and I took it back roughly. I shoved his wand back into his waiting hands. I was about to start screaming at him when Umbridge walked beneath the stands to find us.

"What a coincidence to find you here," she said, her gaze directed towards me. "I just saw a young man running from here. He was obviously hexed." She smiled in her usual grotesque way. "Which one of you thought it would be funny to use such a dangerous spell?"

I was fully prepared to answer but Michael spoke up. "It was me, Professor," he said softly, looking from my astonished face to Umbridge's surprised expression. He slowly held out his wand and said, "You can check it if you want."

"No!" I screamed, looking furiously at Michael. "It wasn't him!"

"Detention, Mister Corner," she said, reveling in my pleas. "Every night this week," she added, as she turned up her nose and leaving us.

"Why?" I said loudly to Michael. "I told you that *I am not fragile!*" I placed my wand back into the pocket of my robes. "I have handled Vaisey long before we started dating. I can fight my own battles."

Michael nodded. "I'm sorry," he said simply. I hated the fact that he looked adorable when I was scolding him. Sort of took the whole fun out of fighting.

"I need a boyfriend, not a hero." My anger was passing. I walked towards him and intertwined my hand in his. His facial expression loosened as we walked towards the castle.

The fact that Harry, Fred, and George were banned from the Gryffindor Quidditch team sent chills down every spine in the house of the Lion. If there were any doubts that Umbridge had a vendetta against Harry, that should have convinced the unbelievers.

This was my chance though to prove to my brothers, to prove to myself, and to finally shut Zacharias Smith up, that I was a born Quidditch player. After Angelina watched me practice, she remarked that I might have a bit of Fred and George in me. When she assigned me as Seeker, she mentioned that I must have been taking notes while Harry was playing.

I found my twin brothers later in their usual corner of the common room. Hunched over some parchment, they were whispering to each other. When I approached, they looked up and smiled.

"Angelina told us the news," Fred said.

"Where did you learn to fly as good as she said?" George asked.

I grinned. It was nice to have the shoe on the other foot for once. I casually twirled my hair in my fingers. "Ask no questions, boys, and I shall tell *you* no lies." I patted each of them on the shoulders. "Don't worry. You'll be back on the team soon enough."

George held the paper towards me. "Once we have everything squared away, Ginny, we're out of here."

"Without Quidditch, what real reason do we have to stay?" Fred questioned.

They had finally decided that they were done with their education. I took the paper in my hands and read it. It was a lease for Diagon

Alley premises. My insides leapt with sadness. My brothers were going to be leaving and who would I go to for a little bit of mayhem? "This is... great, I guess. When are you leaving?" I asked.

"That's the problem," George said.

"It's taking a lot of convincing. The landlord isn't too keen on renting to two 17-year-olds," Fred said. He took the paper back and placed it on the table.

"It might take a few months," George informed.

I told them that I would miss them immensely and kissed them both on the cheek, leaving them to wonder how I learned to fly so well.

On the last DA meeting before Christmas break, I traveled towards Ravenclaw Tower to walk with Michael to the Room of Requirement. He was supposed to meet me at the door because, unlike my house, you had to answer a logical riddle and I had never been very good at them. Not really wanting to wait, I knocked.

Like a cannon blast, the head of an eagle popped out. The musical voice of the bird spoke. "How do you know when you are superior?"

"Er..."

"The truly superior person is the one that thinks himself inferior," came the voice from behind me. The bird chanted "well reasoned" and the door swung open. Cho joined my side. I looked at her face, noting that her eyes were not red and puffy as they had been for months.

"Thanks, Cho," I said, though I was disappointed that I had not thought of that one myself. It sounded simple compared to some of the ones I had while trying to get into the tower. It once asked me about Time-Turners and I had to wait twenty minutes before someone came along with the answer.

"Are you waiting for Michael?" she asked, pushing the door further open for me.

“Actually, he was supposed to meet me outside of the door,” I replied. Walking into the circular room, I noticed the white marble statue of Rowena Ravenclaw in a niche in the far end of the room. “We Gryffindors think more with our hearts, and less with our brains.”

Cho giggled. “I would prefer just a password. Sometimes when I’m in a rush, I can’t think straight.” She looked towards the entrance of the dormitories. “Where is Marietta?” she muttered, and looked back at me. “Congratulations on being the new Seeker. If the rumors are true about your flying, I’m going to have to train extra hard for our game.”

I shrugged. “I’ll never be as good as Harry.”

She smiled. I recognized that expression; it had matched the one I was trying to suppress around Harry. She was smitten with the boy. “Can I ask you something, Ginny?” she questioned.

“As long as it’s not a logical riddle.”

She laughed and promised that it wasn’t. “Do you think that Harry... I mean... could you ever see me and... um...”

I understood what she meant. I found it odd that I was here with her, bonding, and talking like we were friends. I found it odd that I was about to offer my advice on her crush with the same boy that I had harbored a crush on for years. I also found it odd that I was strangely comfortable.

She continued. “I just figured that since Harry is so close to your family, maybe...”

I cut her off. “Cho, just talk to him. Trust me, he fancies you.” *And I would notice, not that I’m jealous.*

Cho blushed and sheepishly looked towards the dormitories again. This time, she greeted Marietta with a hello. She looked back at me, mouthed the words *thank you*, and joined Marietta. Passing by me, Marietta shot me a disgusted look. As they walked out the door, I gave Edgcombe the same stare.

As soon as I found a comfortable place on the couch, Michael entered the room. He slipped his hand into his pocket and took something out of it. He gripped the object in his fist so I would not see it. I was curious so I batted my eyes at him and asked what he was hiding from me.

"We didn't talk about exchanging for Christmas," Michael said. His green eyes twinkled at the thought of what was to come. "But I wanted to give you something anyhow."

He took both my hands and cupped them beneath his left fist. Releasing his grip, he dropped something into my hands. Without looking at it, I stood up and placed myself on my tiptoes, kissing him slowly. I pulled him to the couch to continue my kissing until he was breathless. "Merry Christmas," I said.

Michael breathed in and released the air from his lungs with great effort. "Merry Christmas, Ginny," he said back. He motioned towards the object in my hand and asked if I liked it.

I had not yet looked at what he had given me. Opening my grasp and peering into the palm of my hand, I saw an attractive necklace. A red ruby that matched my hair was placed into the interlocking thin chain. I was surprised that I liked it so much. "It's beautiful!" I exclaimed. "Put it on me?"

Repositioning himself behind me, he took each end of the chain in his fingers and placed it around my neck. He kissed my skin as he clicked the snap shut. *I can get used to this kind of kiss*, I thought.

That's when he ruined it. "It's a bewitched ruby. It's becoming an increasingly difficult world. When you're in trouble, the necklace will let me know and I will help you as soon as possible."

I have to credit where credit is due. The necklace might have been a good idea for anyone else but me. I had scolded him weeks earlier for taking it so easy on me during the DA lessons. I had repeatedly asked him to let me fight my own battles. I did not *need* nor did I *want* him to be my *hero*.

“Er, thanks.” I took him by the hand and said rather coldly, “We’re going to be late.”

It wasn’t a pleasant DA lesson for me. Michael could sense that something was wrong but he couldn’t run it through his mind that it was something he did. I’m ashamed to admit that I tried extra hard with the spells that night.

“What’s wrong, Ginny?” Michael asked me, as he exited the Room. He grabbed me by the hand and stopped me, pulling me towards him. “Will you talk to me?”

I didn’t say anything. I simply stared at him and let an awkward moment pass between us. I was usually one to speak my mind, but I wanted to keep this relationship healthy. And wouldn’t I just consider my reaction silly later on?

“The necklace,” Michael said. I was about to agree with him, but he continued. “You’re not wearing it,” he said.

I reached up to find my bare skin. I was secretly relieved to be rid of it, but I knew Michael would be disappointed if I didn’t find it. “It must have fallen off,” I replied. I wished him goodnight, told him I’d go back and find it, and I’d see him before he left for the break.

Grumbling, I made my way back to Room of Requirement. It had not been a good night. I was relieved that break was soon here and I would have a break from all of this. A break from a boyfriend who had no idea what I would like for a Christmas gift, a break from a boyfriend who was so daft that he couldn’t sense when I was disgruntled with him, and a break from the boyfriend that I was beginning to... *No, Ginny. It’s just the gift. You’ll get over it.*

I opened the door and stopped in my tracks. Over in the corner, I saw Cho and Harry beneath the mistletoe. I hadn’t realized anyone was still there.

“I really like you, Harry,” Cho said softly.

I was suddenly aware that I shouldn’t be watching this scene, but I could not manage to tear myself away. I watched Cho moving closer

to Harry, closer, and closer until they were touching. They were kissing.

I felt the color drain from my face. I backed up out of the room and slumped against the wall. I was trembling, replaying the scene over and over again in my head. *Cho Harry Cho Harry...*

I couldn't sit there. They would exit the room and find me and they would know that I had seen them kiss. Cho would know why I was so upset. Harry would be embarrassed that his best mate's little sister was fawning over him again. I forced myself to stand and headed towards Gryffindor Tower.

I was so angry. I was angry at Michael. I was angry at Cho. I was angry at Harry. I was, most significantly, angry with myself. I thought I had been fine with this. In fact, I fancied myself so fine with it that *I helped the process move along* a time or two, the latest only hours prior. It's not like I didn't know what was happening. I knew that Harry and Cho were an inevitable entity but I was not fully prepared for the feeling it gave me. I did not expect to feel so numb.

I felt hollow inside, like I'd never be happy again.

I didn't sleep that night. I continued to replay that kiss in my head, wanting it to be me so desperately it hurt. I laid there for hours, staring up at the ceiling, always on the verge of crying, but refusing to do so. I bottled it away and processed fury instead.

"Ginny, wake up."

I sat up in my bed and saw Professor McGonagall. She stood in the entrance of my room with her wand lit. Her face looked so weary. "I never went to sleep," I answered.

"There's been an accident. Come with me quick."

All the way to Dumbledore's office, I forgot about Harry and Cho. Instead, I thought about the Dark Mark. I began to imagine that Dad had come home from work and saw the green skull and serpent hovering manically above the Burrow. I imagined him opening the

door to find that Mum had been murdered. I imagined Voldemort had finally made his return public.

Dad had been attacked while on duty for the Order of the Phoenix. Harry had seen, *no*, he had *been* the snake that almost killed my father. I couldn't wrap my head around that until years later when we finally learned the relationship between Voldemort and Harry.

Harry had saved my father's life. If he had not seen what that snake had done, my father would have died. It was frightening, yes, that Harry was connected like this to Voldemort but if not for him, we would have had to bury Arthur Weasley.

After we said goodbye to Dad, I allowed each of my family members and mentors to exit the room first. I lingered behind, reaching the door and pausing. I placed my hand on the door frame as I hoped Dad would notice my hesitance. After a second, I was about to move again.

"Ginny," Dad called me, "do you need to talk to me about something?"

I stopped and turned back to my father. As I nodded, I walked back towards his bed. I felt horrible inside and I needed to talk to him alone, without the watchful eyes of my brothers. I fought back tears as I journeyed near.

He took my hand as I came closer. "Hey," he said, squeezing it tightly, "it's just me in here. You don't have to be so tough all the time. When haven't you been able to cry in front of me?"

I wrapped my arms around him and gave a big sob. "I was so scared," I whispered into his chest. All of a sudden, all my frustration over the past 24 hours, all the troubles I had been bottling up, came spilling from my eyes in big, hot tears.

"Shh," Dad soothed, stroking my hair. "I'm perfectly fine. I'll be out of here in no time, you know that."

"I... I... know..."

“Is anything else bothering you?”

The question opened up the dam. “I’ve been fighting with Michael, and, and... he doesn’t understand me,” I said, hiccupping. I felt myself slowly reverting to a child-like demeanor, but I didn’t care in that moment. “He takes it easy on m-m-me. I’m not his equal. I’m just helpless to h-h-him.

“And I’m trying my best to get over Harry,” I continued. “And I’m trying to be nice to Cho, even though she is completely the wrong person for Harry... and... I saw them together, Dad, under mistletoe...

“Then...” I hiccupped. “Then you... I almost lost you.”

Dad chuckled, lifting my chin to look into my eyes. “There’s my little girl,” he said.

I managed to laugh between the hiccupping spasms. “I’m not little,” I muttered.

Dad smiled, his light eyes sparkling. “I thought I told you that you’ll *a/ways* be my little girl,” he said. “Relationships take work, Ginny. You’re not going to get it right on the first try. You’ve got to be willing to give a little if you expect Michael to give a little as well.”

I grunted.

He took his index finger and tapped my forehead twice. “It wouldn’t hurt to allow him inside your head either,” he suggested.

“No,” I said quickly.

“You’ve *a/ways* been so independent, Gin,” Dad said, “but you’ve never kept people out. Don’t let what happened in the Chamber ruin the relationships you have. You do that, and You-Know-Who has already won.”

I nodded.

“And if he still doesn’t treat you as you should be treated, you let me know,” he replied, balling his hand into a fist. “Daddy will take care of him.”

I laughed. “Thanks, Dad,” I said, snuggling up closer to him. I caught a whiff of the familiar scent of the Burrow. “I was really scared,” I whispered. “And angry. Sirius wouldn’t allow us to leave.”

“He did the right thing,” Dad said. “You don’t understand it yet, Ginny, but these are things your Mum and I believe very passionately in. Sometime what we *want* doesn’t matter.”

I frowned, not liking the idea of my dad suggesting what I thought he was suggesting. “Is it really worth dying for?” I asked.

Without hesitation, Dad said yes. “Do I like being shackled up because a snake bit me?” He shook his head. “No,” he replied, “but if that’s what it takes to create perfect world for *you*, then I think that’s a goal worth dying for.” He tucked a strand of hair behind my ear. “Maybe you’re still too young. I hope one day you’ll understand.”

“Ginny,” Mum called from the doorway, “it’s time to leave.”

“She’ll be right out, Molly,” Dad said. When Mum walked back out, Dad said, “I bet you’re worried about Harry as well. I assume the twins had their Extendable Ears.”

I bit my lip and nodded.

“I saw your faces when you walked back in,” Dad said, “but Harry’s expression worried me the most. He barely said goodbye.”

“Moody said You-Know-Who is possessing him,” I replied.

Dad nodded. “Talk to him,” he suggested. “You’re the only one who can even begin to relate what he’s going through. He’s going to blame himself for this. Can you be there for him?”

I swallowed apprehensively. “I’ll try,” I admitted, “but I don’t know if he’ll listen.”

"He'll listen," Dad said conclusively. "And if he doesn't, just bring out that famous Ginny temper and he won't be able to ignore you." He winked at me.

As he wiped the dampness from my cheeks, I said with a large smile, "Don't you dare tell anyone how much I cried in here."

"Get out of here," he said, playfully pushing me away. As I got to my feet, he said, "Don't forget anything I said. I love you, Ginny."

"I love you, too."

As I expected, Harry reacted just as Dad and I thought he would. He was distant and refused to make eye contact with any of us. He was hurting and I wanted so badly to comfort him.

Harry looked surprised to see us waiting for him when Hermione led him into his room. He had been so moody lately and when we tried to talk to him, he snapped at us. Well, I had enough of that, and I snapped back at him. I had not spent a lot of time with Harry this term but Hermione had told me plenty of stories about Harry's moods. She was right.

"We wanted to talk *to you*, Harry," I said to him, "but as you've been hiding ever since we got back—"

And Harry cut me off this time. *Is this how it's going to be, buddy?* I thought. "I didn't want anyone to talk to me," Harry said.

I wasn't about to back down the same Ron and Hermione would do. I wasn't about to take his abuse. *I* was not in a good mood. I was fighting with my boyfriend. I had watched him kiss Cho. *My father had almost died.* And he sits there like he's in so much turmoil, whimpering that he might have been possessed by You-Know-Who!?

"Well, that was a bit stupid of you." I can't believe I didn't shout it. "Seeing as you don't know anyone but me who's been possessed by You-Know-Who, and I can tell you how it feels."

That shut him up. "I forgot," he said.

“Lucky you,” I said, giving him a look to rival Mum’s.

“I’m sorry.” He felt bad, he really did. “So... so do you think I’m being possessed, then?”

I felt satisfied that I was able to calm the boy down. It was a talent I would take with me when we started dating. “Well, can you remember everything you’ve been doing? Are there big blank periods where you don’t know what you’ve been up to?”

“No.”

“Then You-Know-Who hasn’t ever possessed you.”

The first night back from Christmas break, I didn’t sleep very well. I awoke in cold sweat, fresh from the world of nightmare that I had been visiting. I scanned my dark room, fully expecting to see Tom Riddle at the foot of the bed watching me, his snake-like body hissing over the body of my father.

Delia laid soundly beneath her covers. If I had been thrashing loudly as I usually did, she had not been disturbed. Perhaps a year ago, she would be by my side as soon as I was released from my slumber, but not any longer. She had gotten used to my consistent sleepless nights, but I had failed to accomplish that feat. That was something I would never be used to.

I knew it was risky to venture outside after hours, although I wasn’t sure if it would matter since classes had not officially begun yet. I didn’t care. I needed fresh scenery. The bed reminded me too much of the most recent nightmare. Slipping on my shoes and finding my warm coat, I made the potentially illegal journey into the night.

During my years at Hogwarts, whenever I required comfort from heartache, I would find my spot beside the lake. It was there I first tried out my Bat-Bogey Hex against the grindylow to dismal effects. It was there I had first kissed Michael. I liked that spot. It was peaceful.

Someone, though, was already standing there beneath the tree. When I glanced down at the snow, I should have seen the footprints.

The silhouette of the person was unmistakable as I came closer. Approaching the figure, I said softly, "Evening, Neville."

He jumped at the sound of my voice. When he looked at me, he greeted me with a forced smile. By the glow of my wand, it looked as if he had been crying. "Evening, Ginny," he said.

It was the first time I had seen Neville since we met him at St. Mungo's. In my four years of knowing him, I had been completely ignorant of his parents' conditions. Standing there beside Neville that evening, I wanted to ask him about it but figured the subject was far too sensitive, and if anyone understood sensitive subjects, it was me.

"I'm not ashamed of my parents," Neville said, breaking the silence. A cool wind whistled through the trees as he continued. "It hurts to talk about them. I don't even remember them as they were."

He held out the gum wrapper that his mother had given him when we were there. He placed it in my hand and I examined it. He said, "I keep them all. Somehow, I think if I throw them away, I'd be throwing my parents away, too."

I wished there had been something I could say to him that could help, but there was not, just like there was nothing anyone could say to stop my nightmares. The only difference was that his nightmare was still real when he woke up.

I did the only thing I thought might help. I placed my free hand in his and gave it an affectionate squeeze. He looked from me, to our hands, and back to my face, and smiled, understanding the gesture as purely platonic. "Thanks, Ginny. You're a good friend."

I maneuvered his arm around my shoulders. I turned to him, wrapped my arms around his midsection, and hugged him. He was a sweet boy and I was glad to know him. "You're a good friend, too."

Standing there in silence for a few minutes, he breathed lighter than when I first arrived. His icy breath came out in small, puffy clouds. "Do you remember the first time we met?" he asked, and I muttered that I did. "You asked what the dementors made me see."

“Neville, you don’t have to tell me.”

He ignored me and I assumed he needed to discuss what was on his mind. “When I was seven, I overheard the healers talking about my parents. ‘Good people,’ they said, ‘never gave up even under the torture curse. Bellatrix was looking for the boy. What a shame, what a shame,’” he said.

That was his worst memory, the horror of realizing the exact circumstances of his parents’ conditions. I shivered. I watched tears escape from his left eye, cascade down his left cheek, and fall to the snow below. His distant eyes focused across the lake at some unknown location far away from the Hogwarts grounds.

“They were looking for me,” he said. “My parents are like that because they were protecting me.”

“We are standing up for what we believe,” I said, “and learning what is necessary to stop an evil man. When we join the fight, we’ll be ready. I know your parents would be proud of you.”

I took his hand and placed the gum wrapper back inside his palm. He didn’t grasp it, but rather let it fall to the snow. He was, at least partially, freeing himself from the bondage that had held him down for so long. You could see that determination the most when Bellatrix and the Death Eaters escaped from Azkaban later that month.

Covering all that Neville wanted to cover, he asked if I was alright. I thought back on the previous few weeks and the most recent nightmares. I told him honestly, “No, Neville, I’m a mess right now.”

His eyes refocused on something behind me. Listening closely, I heard the soft crunching of approaching footsteps. Neville jerked his head towards the sound and said, “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Turning from Neville, I met the Michael’s stare. Secretly pleading with Neville not to leave, I watched the boy walk away. I thought back to the night many months ago when Michael sought me out in a situation very similar to this.

I hadn't missed Michael over the break. I had left angry with him, but seeing him there seeking me out, I felt sadness. Dad's advice had convinced me that I must have really hurt the boy and to give the relationship another shot. I really wanted to make it work.

"Where have you been, Ginny?" Michael said, panic in his voice. "I've been so worried about you." Fortunately the news of my father had not reached the students' ears.

"With my family," I said, fully aware that I had omitted important details. "I told you before break where I was going."

Michael shook his head. "Delia said you were gone before break even started," he said, his concern quickly transforming into annoyance. "What happened?"

"I..." I started, trying to come up with a lie that would be believable. "I can't tell you." Defeated, I refused to meet the green eyes that could melt my heart.

"There's an awful lot you can't tell your boyfriend," Michael shouted. "You can't tell me about your summer, you can't tell me about your winter break, and you can't tell me what that Tom Riddle bloke ever did to hurt you."

Back to that subject, are we? I seem to remember our last little wintry tryst proceeding in the same way. We ended up not speaking for months. I was determined to keep my cool this time.

"And I still can't tell you..."

"Can't or won't?" Michael shouted.

When I looked up at him, his face was contorted with so much anger and hurt. I hated keeping my boyfriend in the dark, but even I understood that I had information that could compromise the Order. I was not about to be responsible for that.

"*Can't*," I said. "You knew there were things I couldn't tell you when we first started dating."

"No problem telling Longbottom, do you?" Michael motioned behind him. Neville had reached the stairwell of the castle and had stopped to look back, obviously hearing his name shouted.

"For your information, I was comforting Neville."

"Can't tell me about that either, can you?"

"Neville's problems are not mine to tell. If he wants you to know, he'll tell you." I felt like I was handling the situation with ease. Michael did not look as angry as he did a few moments ago. *Don't lose your cool, girl. There's a chance to save this.* "This isn't about Neville though, so please keep him out of this."

"No, this is about how I can't get close to you," Michael growled. "You won't let me close. You won't let me in." He had never been this passionate. "I want to be close to you because I think..." He paused, his facial expressions becoming less about rage. "I think I love you..."

"What?" I repeated his words in my head. I stood there, staring at him, letting the nipping wind grab hold of my hair and throw it every which way. My hands were rigid at my side. Michael Corner loved me, despite how I'd kept him at a distance, despite how I had never let him in, despite *all* that, he loved me.

I couldn't bring myself to say the words back to him. I had told only one person outside my family those words and he hadn't even been awake when I told him. I may have been raised in a male-dominant household, but I was still a girl, and he was the first boy to tell me that he loved me. Call me sappy, call me sentimental, call me whatever you like, but hearing those words melted the negative feelings in me.

I ran to Michael and embraced his body, and I allowed him to hold me. I felt *safe* again in his embrace. My embrace must have convinced him that I felt strongly for him. That was enough for me and it must have been enough for him. Nothing was fixed that night. Nothing was solved between us. But the following couple months between us were fine.

Chapter Nine: Worth Dying For

It had been a difficult Valentine's Day. Michael and I had been unable to celebrate and he was sorely disappointed. I told him that it was just one day and we would have plenty more. It wasn't *my* fault, you know. Two days after February 14, it was still difficult. Michael was still complaining, practice had been dismal, and the twins were dreading our next game.

After dinner, I showered, changed, and sought Hermione's company. She was sitting on her bed with a book as usual and a smug look on her face. I had not spoken to her yet about the latest details of her elaborate plan. By the looks of her two-day grin, her plan had gone on without a hitch. Rita Skeeter had *finally* done something right. Dropping her book on her lap, she looked up at me and said, "I think this is going to work."

We had been worried that Harry might not want to do the interview, and Hermione looked pleased that he had been helpful. "Did he talk about it all? Even Cedric's death?" I asked.

"Especially Cedric's death," Hermione replied. "He was brilliant." Her eyes twinkled in pride. She studied me and decided to go on. "Too bad Harry couldn't have been brilliant on his date."

Oh yes. I had almost forgotten that Harry had taken Cho out on Valentine's Day. Since I witnessed their kiss, I had been unusually cold towards Cho. Trying to hide my complete curiosity, I asked as casually as I could, "The date didn't go well then?"

"It was a disaster," Hermione admitted. "Harry was tactless and Cho started crying." While she retold the tale, I couldn't help but grin. After their mistletoe rendezvous, I had been silently advocating their demise.

"Good," I said.

Hermione looked surprised. "What do you mean *good*? Wasn't it *you* who nudged Cho along? Wasn't it *you* who told me she wasn't all that bad?" She had counted off the reasons on her fingers. "That's a bit hypocritical of you. I thought you wanted them to be together."

"I did," I said, choosing my words carefully. I had not told Hermione that I had observed their seasonal snog. I wasn't sure how to explain my view logically when she already knew. "But..." I started, settling on a good approach, "Cho is not right for Harry."

"And I suppose you know exactly who *is* right for Harry?"

I laughed. "Not me!" But that's exactly what I was thinking. "Cho is far too weepy for him. If you fancy a boy, he's supposed to make you happier." And I *really* did believe that. I understood that Cho had lost Cedric, but she should be generally healed if she wanted to find another guy. It's not fair to Harry to have to pick up the pieces.

Hermione gave me the knowing look. Instead of scolding me, she nodded. "Honestly, I think you're right. Harry needs someone who can be his equal." She thumbed through pages of her book before continuing, "But I don't know anyone who is *available*."

Ignoring Hermione, I hugged her goodnight and went back to my room, satisfied that Harry was finally free of Cho's weeping web. I slept excellently that night.

The following Monday, the *Quibbler* was released and the student body tore through it like candy. Umbridge did the only good thing all year and banned it, ensuring that every single person in that school wanted to read it.

Including Cho. I almost threw up when I saw her walk into the one hallway, stick her hand in Harry's, and whisper something in his ear that made him smile. She kissed him on the cheek and was gone. I sighed. Harry was back on speaking terms with her and I was back on hexing-terms with her again.

In early April, we had finally reached Patronus lesson. Michael and I stood side by side, attempting to conjure our creatures, yelling, "*Expecto Patronum*" and watching the silvery vapor escape from the tip of our wands.

Near the middle of the lesson, Michael's had taken the distinct shape of a raven. It soared by my head and I admired just how beautiful they truly were. I, on the other hand, could not conjure a definite

shape. I had tried most of my memories with Michael in the last nine months, but apparently they weren't happy enough.

"You've got to think of something happy," Harry told Neville, who looked like he was having just as much trouble as I was.

I growled as another wisp of vapor escaped my wand. I looked at Michael for help. "What happy memory are you using?" I asked him, a bit ashamed that I required assistance.

"The Yule Ball," Michael said, his green eyes reflecting the silver vapors in the room. "When we first danced, I knew how much I liked you. Try that memory."

I didn't want to say anything but I had already tried that one. Closing my eyes, I loosened my memories, thinking about Michael and the first time we kissed, but that had ended badly. I thought about when we first starting dating, but we had spent the next two months without contact. None of those was working.

I'm not sure how I found myself engulfed in memories not concerning Michael. Soon, my mind had jumped back five and a half years to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. I was ten years old, getting ready to say goodbye to Ron, begging Mum to let me go to Hogwarts, when I saw him. He looked so lost. His unkempt hair hid the scar he was known for. His taped glasses disguised his fame. And my ten-year-old heart skipped a beat when he looked at me.

"*Expecto Patronum!*" I shouted. From the end of my wand, a silvery vapor exploded and a horse, the most beautiful stallion I had ever seen in my life, stood there, pawing the ground. Quickly, it galloped around the room, running beside a silver stag.

"It worked!" Michael exclaimed, but I said nothing. I felt ashamed, knowing that it was Harry's memory that had produced my Patronus and not Michael's.

It was then that everything we had worked for came crashing down. Dobby rushed in, rambling on and on. By the time everyone finally noticed the house-elf and his crazy hat collection, Harry already had a panicked look in his eyes.

Turning from Dobby quickly, he bellowed, "WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? RUN!" He pointed towards the door.

"Come on!" Michael said, his voice full of fear. He grabbed my hand as we passed by Cho. She wasn't moving. "Cho! Don't stand there, c'mon!" He grabbed her hand as well and pulled her towards the door.

It only registered slightly that he had my hand *and* Cho's hand. Finally out the door, I glanced back at the Room and saw Harry place Dobby on the ground. Just as we turned the corner, he screamed and I saw Harry fall to the corridor floor hard.

I pulled with all my might to stop Michael. "Stop! They got Harry!"

"They got Harry?" Cho gasped. She wrenched away from Michael's grasp and peered around the corner. She jerked her head back and looked at Michael and me. "They did," she whispered.

"I'm going back," I said, once again trying to escape Michael's grasp. He held on tight and shook his head. "Michael, let me go right now," I shouted.

He shushed me. "There's nothing we can do," Michael whispered.

"We can fight!" I hissed.

"We can't *fight a teacher*," Cho said softly. She put her face into her hands and began to cry. I was quickly becoming annoyed.

"Harry wouldn't want us to take the fall with him," Michael reasoned with me. "They already know he was there. If we help him get away, then we're all expelled. *Now come on!*" He pulled me and I reluctantly followed. Michael swiftly led the way to Ravenclaw Tower.

I couldn't believe that Harry was going to be expelled. He had worked so hard teaching us and now he was gone. What if they found Hermione's list? Would Umbridge really expel that many students? And it had been Seamus's first night. I felt so horrible.

Saying very little to each other, the three of us managed to find our sanctuary in the Ravenclaw Common Room. As I stepped foot into the circular area, I thought, *who ratted us out?*

I stopped, running the list of people through my head and trying to figure out who it could be. Zacharias Smith was the first person that ran through my mind, but he had been there tonight. If he really had been the traitor, he wouldn't have showed up tonight. I even considered that Seamus was sent as a spy, but he hated Umbridge as much as anyone. I stared at Michael and then at Cho.

"Cho," I said slowly, "where was Marietta tonight?"

Cho, who had been sitting in the biggest chair in the room, refused to look towards me. She whimpered again and took a great interest in looking at the fireplace. I repeated myself and she didn't answer.

I pulled my wand from my pocket. I pointed it towards her and said clearly, "Answer me, Cho."

Cho looked at me. Her eyes were red. "I don't know," she said. She shook her head. "You think it was her, don't you?"

"She's the only person who wasn't there tonight," I shouted, growing angrier and angrier. "Who the hell do *you* think it was?" I took a few steps towards her, but Michael stepped in front of me. "Move, Michael."

"I can't let you lose your temper," he said, placing a gentle hand on my wand hand and lowering it. "You don't want to do something you're going to regret."

"Trust me. I would take *great* pleasure in it," I jeered. I placed my wand back into my pocket but was not about to place my anger in there, too. "How can you be so calm about this, Michael? Someone betrayed us!"

"But I refuse to start pointing fingers until we know for sure!" Michael shouted.

"It was her miserable, little sneak of a friend!" I screamed. I'm sure that all of Ravenclaw Tower was awake by now.

Cho was in tears completely, sobbing into her arms. She shook uncontrollably and between chokes, I heard words such as "Harry" and "Marietta."

"I'm leaving," I said.

Michael stood in front of me again, shaking his head. "I'm not trying to tell you what to do, Ginny, but it wouldn't be smart to leave now. Sleep on the couch..." he said. Upon seeing my scowl, he added, "Please."

I sighed and unwillingly sat on the couch. He sat beside me and held my hand, rubbing it with his opposite hand. I refused to look at him. I found more interest in staring daggers into Cho's body. No one spoke for an hour; the only thing heard was Cho's hiccups.

An hour later, Michael was asleep. The door to the tower swung open. Staring towards the entrance, Marietta stood there confused. Distinctly across her forehead in perfect little pimples was the word *Sneak*.

I jumped up before I knew what I was doing. Brown eyes blazing, I screamed, "HOW COULD YOU DO IT!?"

Marietta looked terrified. She cowered against the door. "Do what?"

"Do *what*, Edgecombe?" I shouted. I pointed my finger towards her forehead and roughly traced my finger across her pimply skin from left to right. "Hermione's list doesn't lie!"

Michael looked up groggily. He looked at me towering over Marietta and jumped up. He rushed to my side. "Ginny, calm down."

"Hermione did that?" Cho said softly, looking up. Her face turned sour. "What a horrible trick that was."

"Horrible trick?" My eyes grew three sizes as I turned my rage towards her instead. "Bloody brilliant, if you ask me." *That's the little*

bit of my brothers in me. “How can you sit there and defend her? She’s supposed to be *your* friend! She obviously wasn’t friendly enough to let you know she was about to betray us all!”

“I...” Marietta stared. “I don’t even remember.”

I clenched my teeth. I don’t mind innocent fibs, but when a person lies when the truth is clear, I can’t stand it. Michael’s hands found my arms and I looked at him. “You’re being awfully quiet.” I hissed. “Don’t tell me you’re on *their* side?”

Michael shifted his focus to Marietta’s head, over to Cho sitting in the chair, and back to me. “No,” he said, but I knew he was lying. He was trying to save face, taking my side just to calm me down, and I wasn’t about to stand for that.

“Liar,” I muttered and pushed Marietta away from the door. I didn’t care if they were patrolling the corridors. In the mood I was in, I would love to see one of the Umbridge’s cronies cross paths with me. Glancing over my shoulder as I rounded the first curve, I knew Michael wasn’t about to come after me.

The details of Dumbledore’s departure traveled fast. He had taken the fall for Harry and the rest of us and once again, Harry had escaped unscathed.

“It’s going to be a long three months,” Dean said, standing in the Great Hall beside me as we both read Educational Decree Number Twenty-Eight. “Dumbledore gone, Umbridge as the new headmistress...”

I read the decree for probably the eighth time since Dean and I stood there. After all the work to keep her out of our lives, we were left in shambles and no one was willing to pick up the pieces. It was far too risky now.

“Welcome to Hell, Hogwarts,” I said.

“Kind of makes you rethink your priorities, doesn’t it, Little Sis?” Dean questioned. There was that name again. Turning to him, I expected

one of his usual remarks. I was not disappointed. "Now that you and Michael are over-

I cut him off. "We haven't broken up," I replied. "We just aren't speaking right now. If he pulls his head out of his..."

"Ask us," a familiar voice from behind, "what your dear brothers are planning as a welcoming gift for our new Headmistress."

Fred and George grabbed me by my arms, one on each side, and lugged me away from Dean. I waved a giddy goodbye to the boy and waited for the twins to set me down on the seat closest to the door.

"So," I said eagerly, "what *are* my dear brothers planning?"

"Ta da," Fred pulled from his robes the same piece of parchment they had been hunched over months earlier. It was the lease. "Know what this is?"

"Freedom," said George smiling.

"As soon as we get this little document to the landlord, you are looking at the new tenants of 93 Diagon Alley," Fred said.

I squealed. Though I was desperately going to miss my brothers, I was extremely proud of them for following their dreams. I hugged each of them, followed by two playful smacks. "I can't believe you're deserting us *now*. This is when Hogwarts really needs you!"

"Ginny, Ginny, Ginny," said Fred, shaking his index finger at me.

"Oh ye of little faith!" said George.

"We're not leaving for at least another week and a half," said Fred.

"Right after Easter break," said George.

A large grin crept upon my face. I had a sneaking suspicion that I'd love hearing the next part of the conversation. "Yeah, and...?"

"Just stay in the Great Hall," Fred said.

"It's going to be a great show," said George cryptically.

"We are off to warn the others," Fred said.

They stopped kneeling and stood up, winking at me as they left. As soon as they were gone, Delia sat down next to me.

"Is it true?" Delia asked. "Did you and Michael break up?"

"No," I said and explained to her the short version of the previous night's events. I glanced up and saw Harper and Vaisey walk into the Hall, looking cockier than usual.

"I'm glad you're not expelled," Delia said. "You're one of the only reasons I still stick around this school." She had repeatedly told me that she would rather be back in the Muggle world. I didn't expect her to return the following year.

Harper and Vaisey stood right in front of us now. I noticed each Slytherin played host to a tiny silver / on the front of their robes. I turned my gaze to each of them and said, "What do you want?"

"Don't be so rude, Weasley," Harper said mockingly. "I believe that deserves five points off for such a remark."

"Shut up, Harper," I said, trying to ignore their comment.

"Little Weasley, I wouldn't be so rude," Vaisey said. He rubbed the silver / on his robes. "Harps and me are part of the Inquisitional Squad."

"The what?" Delia questioned.

"Mudbloods must ask to speak with us. That's ten points off," Harper sneered, and looked at me. "Umbridge has chosen certain Ministry-supporting students to assist her in keeping order. So five points off for what you did to us last year at the Quidditch World Cup, five points for the hex you hit me with on the train last year, and another five for the same hex you put on Vaisey a few months ago. Are we forgetting anything, Daemon?"

“She’s friends with a Mudblood. That’s worth ten.”

They walked away laughing and complimenting each other for the forty points they just knocked off Gryffindor. Delia, seemingly unaffected by the words, joined me at the Gryffindor table for lunch, asking me to give in full detail what happened with Michael again.

Only minutes through lunch, I found out what Fred and George had been warning me about. The hallway outside the Great Hall erupted in explosions and colorful flashes. I took a bite of my sandwich as I listened to the sweet sound of chaos.

Silence reigned supreme during Easter break. Fred and George, not wanting to disturb the students’ downtime, were unusually reserved. Michael and I had not spoken since Dumbledore and his army had been disbanded and, if rumor proved accurate, Cho and Harry were no longer an item. It turns out Harry didn’t appreciate Cho’s defense of Marietta either. *HA! Who said him and me weren’t meant for each other?*

I was sitting in the Common Room when Michael found me two days before Easter break ended. I had holed myself up in after *another* horrible Quidditch practice when I watched him walk through the door. *I shouldn’t have given him the password last week*, I thought to myself.

Keeping his eyes on me as he walked towards me, he stopped at the couch. He was holding a box that had obviously been opened and reclosed. He held it out to me and smiled confidently. “Professor McGonagall asked me to deliver these to you.”

The box was marked with “*Inspected and Passed by the Hogwarts High Inquisitor.*” Upon closer examination, I saw that it was from Mum. It must be her annual Easter chocolates. I could definitely use the candy. “Thanks,” I muttered. I waited for him to say something because McGonagall could have easily asked any one of my Gryffindor housemates, so it was obvious that he had volunteered.

“I’m sorry, Ginny,” Michael said finally and he sounded genuine. He stood still, not even shifting his weight nervously from foot to foot. His steadfast demeanor was always the thing I found in him to be most

attractive. "You were right. You're my girlfriend and I should have completely backed you up. I miss you."

It was time to put the wall back down. "I missed you, too," I said, meeting his eyes. "Things have been really nice between us since January."

"I thought so," Michael replied.

"I lost a lot of respect for you, Michael, when you took Cho's side," I replied. "I don't know if you can make up for that, but I don't want to give up on us yet."

"Neither do I," he agreed. He bent over the couch. After he kissed me, he left the Common Room.

I eagerly ripped open the box of chocolates and indulged in one. I was in heaven. Mum had always been able to wow me with her cooking. With a mouth full of delicious candy, I looked at the card she had sent.

Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny

I know it's been tough. I hope this helps.

Love, Mum.

P.S. I made a few extra for Harry and Hermione.

"Where's Harry?" I asked Hermione minutes later, giving her a chocolate to enjoy and a chance to take a break from her overzealous studying.

"I think he stayed... wow, these are good..." Hermione licked her fingers and made an approving sound in the back of her throat. "Tell your Mum thanks."

She reached for another but I lightly slapped her hand away. "The other is for Harry. Do you know where he is?"

Eyeing the candy hungrily, she reminded me of Ron. "He said he was staying at the library to study."

"Study?" I doubtfully asked.

Hermione looked just as skeptical as I sounded. "That's what I thought," she replied. "He looked miserable. Cho's really got him down. Maybe he could use a pick-me-up." She gave me one of those looks again, insinuating that I might be the girl worthy of the job.

"Michael and I made up," I replied.

"That's good," she said, but she failed to hide the displeasure in her voice.

I waved goodbye. With a box of chocolate in my hands and a fierce drive in my heart, I took the epic journey to the library. If Harry was miserable, perhaps I *could* be of service.

I found him sitting by himself in the corner of the library. His books were sitting there with the intent of being excessively studied, but not one of them had been opened. He stared out the window instead, looking over the grounds, lost in a faraway place that didn't require him to cram for his upcoming exams.

He really did look miserable.

I wasn't sure if I wanted to disturb him and his thoughts, but I refused to let him wallow in his sadness alone. Despite his refusal to talk to me about his Prefect-blues, I wanted to try to be a listening ear again. If he didn't want to confide in me yet, I would take the innocent approach for now. Just delivering the candy, thank you very much.

"Harry," I said softly as I approached him. If he had heard me, he was doing a great job at ignoring me. "Harry," I said again, more in singsong type of way. Rolling my eyes and taking my seat across from him, I said a little bit louder, "Harry, I'm talking to you, can you hear me?"

"Huh?" he finally said. Turning from the window and the safety that the world beyond provided him, he looked at me like I was completely

out of place. For a second, I swear he was trying to remember who I was. "Oh hi," he said, eyeing the Quidditch uniform that I had not changed out of yet. "How come you're not at practice?"

It was just like Harry to desperately try to hide the emotions that were displayed on his sleeve for all to see. If he really wanted to pretend that nothing was bothering him, I would play along for the time being. Grumbling, I replied, "It's over. Ron had to take Jack Sloper up to the hospital wing."

"Why?"

"Well," I said, "We're not sure, but we *think* he knocked himself out with his own bat." I quickly scanned his face for any sort of amusement. I found none. "Anyway... a package just arrived, it's only just got through Umbridge's new screening process..."

I lifted the box from my lap and placed it on the table. "It's Easter eggs from Mum..." I lifted the lid and caught Harry studying the hopelessly wrapped and rewrapped box. I found the biggest one in there and pulled it out between my index finger and thumb. "There's one for you..." I extended my hand to him. "There you go."

He took the egg from me and stared at it. Iced Snitches stared back at him. For a long second, I saw him quiver and it had nothing to do with the thought of consuming chocolate.

"Are you okay, Harry?" I asked quietly.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"You seem really down lately," I said. I had to do this delicately otherwise the boy wouldn't open up to me. *Let's get the obvious out of the way.* With every ounce of strength I could formulate, I said, "You know, I'm sure if you just *talked* to Cho..."

"It's not Cho I want to talk to."

And for a fleeting second, my heart skipped a beat. It was over between them. Whatever nervousness that used to dance in his voice when he spoke of Cho was now gone. I leaned towards him anxiously.

"Who is it, then?" I asked, hoping with all hope that it was me he wanted to talk to.

"I..."

Come on, Harry, I silently begged. *Open up to me*. I watched him glance around. Madam Pince and Hannah Abbott were shelves away, well out of range for them to eavesdrop. Could he really be considering confiding in me?

"I wish I could talk to Sirius," he muttered. "But I know I can't."

Victory! A thousand thoughts were flying through my head at once. I managed to keep my face calm, but inside I was dancing. It also registered that he might have told Hermione that Cho had been bothering him, but he had given me the real story.

To obviously distract himself from my knowing eyes, he unwrapped the egg I had given him, broke off a piece, and put it in his mouth.

"Well," I said slowly, careful to hide my satisfaction. I, too, grabbed another egg, knowing that Ron would scold me later for eating his share. "If you really want to talk to Sirius, I expect we could think of a way to do it..."

He cut me off and exclaimed hopelessly, "Come on. With Umbridge policing the fires and reading all our mail?"

I grinned, thinking of the twins finally realizing their dream of opening a joke shop. "The thing about growing up with Fred and George," I said, "is that you sort of start thinking anything's possible if you've got enough nerve."

Immediately, he repositioned himself in his chair, appearing loads more optimistic. The look he gave me sent chills up and down my spine. He opened his mouth to say something.

"WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING?"

Of course this intimate moment with Harry had to be interrupted. "Oh damn," I whispered as Harry and I both pushed our chairs back and jumped to our feet. "I forgot—"

"*Chocolate in the library!*" Madam Pince shouted in rage, barreling towards us with intent in her eyes. "*Out- out- OUT!*" She drew her wand. Books, bag, and ink levitated and began their pursuit of us.

Laughing, I grabbed the chocolate from the table and we sprinted towards the exit. Through the corridors, side by side, we ran as the items smacked us. Finally, as we turned the corner, his possessions fell to a clatter on the floor.

We both leaned against the wall in attempts to catch our breaths. I stole a glance at Harry. Ink was splattered across his face and his hair was more unkempt than unusual. His eyes were closed but he was no longer sulking; he was grinning.

Opening his eyes, he asked, "You've done this before?"

"Once," I replied, thinking back to the moment. "Michael..." *Need I mention him at a moment like this?* "...and I were chased out of there last month. We lost control of a couple chocolate frogs."

He smiled again. I melted even more. "I heard you got in a row with Michael over Marietta," he said.

"He apologized and we made up," I replied, thinking *almost* regrettably to the moment he and I shared less than an hour ago. Hesitant to bring it up again, I said, "I heard you had the same fight with Cho." He nodded, but I didn't want to talk any more about Cho or Michael. "I guess chocolate is not the only thing we have in common." I said.

"You're right," Harry said, *still* grinning. He pointed towards my face and motioned all around it. "You've got a bit of ink on your face."

"Keep talking," I teased, folding my arms and looking slightly away. I tried my best to look annoyed, but couldn't stop smirking. "And I won't say where the ink hit you."

He looked at me, trying to figure out exactly if I was teasing him or if there really was an embarrassing place where the ink had splattered on him.

I rolled my eyes. "Come on. Let's pick up your stuff." I bent down and picked up each of his books. He grabbed the empty ink bottle, stuffed it into his bag, and held the bag open for me to place the books back in.

When he was satisfied with the arrangement, he closed the bag and heaved it over his shoulder. "Thanks, Ginny," he said.

"Harry, it's no big deal. Fred and George will do most of the work."

"Not just that," he said. "For sticking up for me even if it was against your boyfriend. For coming to find me today. For..."

He's going to say it, isn't he?

"...being a friend."

I wasn't sure how to feel about this. I think that was the first time he started looking at me as more than his best mate's little sister. Maybe not as a romantic option, but as a genuine friend. I felt butterflies in my stomach, knowing that they were ecstatic at the development, but also a bit disappointed.

I smiled, thinking about the assistance I was offering him. If only he knew how much I had done for him over the years, how many little things I had managed to do in order to ensure his happiness and well-being, how much happiness I sacrificed with Cho just to see him smile. If only he knew...

For the first time in many months, I blushed. It wasn't even the right moment to do so. He hadn't *complimented* me. He hadn't *touched* me. He had *thanked* me. Sheepishly and utterly embarrassed of my reddening cheeks, I quickly recovered.

"You're welcome, Harry," I said as I backed away from him rather awkwardly. "If you'll excuse me, I'm off to find my brothers."

Finding Fred and George was never as easy as it sounded. They were rarely around when you wanted them to be, and always popping up at the oddest times. Luckily for me, I found them in the Common Room discussing something together.

"Boys," I said, "I need your services."

"Anything for you," Fred said.

"It's more for Harry than me," I said slowly, knowing they would not care who it was for, as long as it caused a bit of mayhem.

Both twins looked mockingly shocked and I knew I was about to be in for a good tease. I braced myself and readied for impact.

"We were under the impression that ickle Ginny was over ickle Harry," George said.

"We thought there was a certain bloke named Michael Corner," said Fred.

"Or are the rumors true and you have said farewell to your prince?" asked George.

I stood there, tapping my foot patiently. We had already been through this part of the conversation and I refused to repeat myself. Looking amused, I said, "Finished, are we?"

"Sorry, Ginny, couldn't help ourselves," Fred admitted.

"So what's on your mind?" George asked.

I explained Harry's situation to them to, reminding them that the mail was being searched and how the Floo Network was being monitored.

"There's your mistake," said Fred.

"Not *all* of them are being monitored," George said, waiting for me to catch on.

I gasped. "*Her* office?"

Both nodded solemnly and I shook my head. There could be no way to get away with this. It was *HER* office. Were they nuts? I swallowed hard and asked them how.

"You remember how we said we were soon gone?" Fred asked.

"We have one more big prank to pull before we made our grand exit," George said.

"We can guarantee Harry twenty minutes."

I left my brothers that day knowing full well they would be able to pull it off. Hermione did her best to convince Harry not to risk it. She even appealed to me, asking me to call it off, but I refused.

Standing there hand in hand with Michael two days later, I watched my brothers rise into the air on their brooms in front of a crowd of fifty or more students, their reflections flickering off the grand portable swamp. Smiling as wide as I possibly could, they commanded Peeves to give Umbridge hell and they were gone. A sense of longing for my brothers mixed with pride sweltered inside me as the crowd of onlookers applauded, whooped, and hollered in approval.

Fred and George had given us all hope.

Chaos... glorious chaos ensued for five weeks. Any student who was able dropped dungbombs in the hallways. Any student who was willing hexed the Inquisitional Squad. Any student who was sane enjoyed it. As the hallways permeated with smells and odors, we walked around with Bubble-Head Charms.

Even with Michael's apology, he and I never quite recovered from that last fight. Finding time for each other was like trying to squeeze water from a rock without magic. Add the fact that his OWLs were quickly approaching and time was scarce.

Finding time with Hermione was also very limited, Ron was going nuts studying, and spending time with Harry was out of the question. Strange enough, I found myself spending a lot of time with Dean Thomas and I don't know how that exactly transpired. One afternoon I

found myself looking for him and I realized that I had been seeking his company for about two weeks.

To make matters worse, I was kissing Michael one night after a difficult Quidditch practice and while I ran my hand through his dark hair, I was surprised *not* to find a lightning bolt shaped scar. Pushing Michael back abruptly, I gasped.

He looked bewildered and thought he did something wrong. As he apologized profusely, I made up an excuse that I had forgotten to write eight lines for Snape's class. I ran out of the Ravenclaw Common Room without saying another word.

I couldn't believe that I had never seen it before. *Dark hair and green eyes, very similar build, and facial features strikingly parallel.* He looked like Harry. When I wrapped my arms around Michael's waist, did I think I was holding Harry? When I kissed Michael's lips, did I imagine myself kissing Harry's? When I got lost completely in Michael's green eyes, did I fancy myself looking into Harry's?

I pushed *those* thoughts far from the forefront of my mind.

On the evening before Ravenclaw versus Gryffindor, I was attempting to calm my nerves. It was the final match and Ravenclaw had been extremely good this year. Not to mention, I'd be playing against my rival Cho Chang. If I could beat her to the Snitch, it would make my year.

I assumed Michael would be able to calm my anxiety. Coming from my dormitory, I paused in the Common Room and looked towards the boy dorms and thought of Dean. If only *he* would come through that entrance, I wouldn't have to make the long trek towards Ravenclaw to be comforted.

Shaking that thought from my head, I performed the Bubble-Head Charm around my face and started my journey. Drifting fumes could be seen in the hallways by now. Peeves, inhabiting a suit of armor, jumped out and startled me. He had obviously been waiting for someone easier to scare.

I arrived in the Ravenclaw Tower less than fifteen minutes later. Walking towards the door, Terry Boot stood there and I assumed he was trying to figure out the latest logical riddle. I was surprised. Terry was usually good at those, figuring out the riddle long before Michael and Anthony.

Removing the Bubble-Head Charm, I said, "If you're waiting for *me* to help you, I'm afraid we're going to be stuck out here for awhile." I clapped my friend on the back.

Terry turned to me, looking alarmingly nervous. "Hey, Ginny," he said, "what are you doing around here?"

Something was wrong. Terry was usually more conversational than this. I eyed him curiously and asked, "Everything okay, Terry?"

"Yeah, fine," he said quickly. "Just having trouble with the riddle."

"Let me hear it," I said.

Terry thought for a second and repeated the bird's words, "Is the glass half-empty or half-full?" He shrugged after saying it and asked if I could figure it out.

"It's all a matter of perspective," I said. I grinned as the bird chimed, "Well reasoned." I knew that one. I had heard that riddle a few weeks ago. Michael, Anthony, Terry, and I were coming back from... *hold up*... Terry had been with when we figured that one out... in fact... it was *Terry's words* that I had just repeated.

Terry looked even more nervous now that the door had been open. He laughed uneasily and said, "Good one, Ginny." He tried nonchalantly to place his arm across the frame of the door.

"Michael sent you out here, didn't he?"

"Look, Ginny, he's not doing anything wrong," he said.

I pushed him out of the way and stormed into the Common Room. Sitting there on the same couch were Cho Chang and Michael

Corner... my boyfriend and the most deplorable Ravenclaw I had ever met...

It was innocent enough, mind you. In any other situation, I might not have been angry. But considering that this was perhaps the shadiest thing someone had ever done to me, I was pissed.

"What do you think you're doing, Michael?" I asked, trying to keep it calm. I'm sure if I gave him the chance, there was a perfectly logical explanation. Maybe Terry was confused. Maybe he had been Confunded.

"I'm just talking to Cho," he said, pointing towards his couch buddy. "There's no harm in talking to someone, is there?"

Terry passed by and I pointed at him viciously. "No harm in talking, no," I replied, "but you sent your friend out to *stall me*?"

"Ginny, hey, I'm sorry," Terry said.

"Shut up!" I shouted. "Terry, this isn't your fault." I turned my attention back to Michael.

"Ginny, calm down," Michael said.

"I won't calm down until you give me an explanation!"

"I was trying to comfort Cho," Michael said. She had slipped away from the couch and was slowly wandering towards the girls' dormitory. "And you're too caught up being angry with her to understand."

"Angry?" I hissed. "OF COURSE, I'M ANGRY! You know *why* I'm angry! And why are you bringing this up now? You apologized and said I was right..."

Then it hit me. He had never been sorry. He had never thought I was right. He was saying that to shut me up, to save face, to agree just to stop an argument. Without saying anything, I backed up past Terry and out the door, angrier than I had been in a long time.

At the bottom of the stairwell, I stopped and considered going back to hex them all. Placing my fingers against my wand, I heard footsteps behind me. Was it Michael coming after me? No, they were much lighter than his.

"I thought I heard you, Ginny." It was Luna. She was dressed in her pyjamas: a white t-shirt and long pants with moving dragons. She saw me staring at her bottoms and remarked, "I wanted to buy a pair that had moving nargles but the store didn't have any."

I shook my head in disbelief. Somehow she was able to cheer me up with such a simple remark. "Hello, Luna."

"Michael is very handsome," she said, "but I don't like him very much."

From anyone else, I think this would have been awkward. With Luna, it could be no other way. I finally noticed her hair, which had been tied in three ponytails.

"Dean fancies you very much," Luna said. "I heard him talking about you yesterday."

Really? Dean fancied me? My heart fluttered slightly and it was then that I realized how attracted I was to Dean. He was funny and, although he treated me like his little sister, it was all in flirtatious fun.

But I couldn't think about that right now.

"I like Dean," Luna continued, as if she were talking to herself. I didn't mind. Her voice was soothing and it was almost as if she was speaking my thoughts aloud. "More than Michael."

"I'm beginning to think the same thing," I muttered.

"You've fancied Harry for a long time, too," Luna said bluntly. "I think you're destined for each other."

I smiled at Luna Lovegood, the girl that had just made my night. I walked away from her. I had a lot to think about and a lot to prepare for the next day.

Cho cried when I caught the Snitch from right under her nose the next day. I suspect everyone thought I was rushing towards the Ravenclaw Seeker to punch her straight in the face. Imagine everyone's amusement when I caught the little golden ball below her little tanned nose. It felt like a personal victory. My only regret is that Harry had not been there to witness it. He would have loved it, I'm sure.

Swooping down and dismounting my broom, I watched Cho chuck her broom across the pitch and tear off towards the changing rooms. Grinning, I saw Michael walking towards me in an unhappy mood.

"Pretending to apologize again?" I asked.

He didn't say anything but looked at me coldly. "Did you have to be so heartless catching the Snitch? Winning isn't enough? You have to make the girl cry, too?"

"She cries if she breaks a nail," I replied. "I was just playing the game. Don't complain to me if your Seeker can't beat me." I tossed him the Snitch and grinned. "See you around, Michael."

But I knew that I wouldn't. Although the words weren't said, I knew that we were over and I was completely fine with that. I was tired of being his defenseless girlfriend. It was time for me to move on.

I spoke to Hermione at lunch on the day of their History of Magic exam. I explained to her, through bites of food, about what had happened between Michael and me. Then I asked her what she thought about Dean. I didn't think she was listening, seeing she was sifting through note cards, but she responded.

"I'm surprised," she said, flipping the note cards, "that you aren't going to shift your focus and attention back to Harry." She glanced up from the rectangular piece of paper. "Unless you're still pretending to be over him."

I frowned and thought about it. The truth was that the last few days, I had been thinking about Dean. He was actually showing interest, whereas Harry was just as oblivious as ever. "No, I don't think so, but Dean appears to be interested."

"You have to do what makes you happy." She shrugged. She excused herself and left the table to catch prime studying time in the library.

Although it would make me happy to be the object of Harry's affection, that was not happening. In fact, it didn't look like it would happen anytime soon. He still viewed me as friend, but Dean, on the other hand...

Two hands covered my eyes. "Guess who, Little Sis!" Dean whispered into my ear. He didn't wait for me to respond, and sat down beside me.

"Shouldn't you be studying?"

"Can't a bloke take a break and visit his favorite Weasley?"

"Oh, I suppose."

"Besides," he said, grabbing my roll and taking a bite from it. "I was just saying hello before I return to the library. Want to help?" He wagged his eyebrows at me.

"Ooh, tempting," I said. I decided to test the waters with Dean and check out his reaction. "So did you hear that Michael and I broke up?"

"I did," he said, taking another bite of the bread. "About time, too, don't you think?" He smiled as he usually did. "Now you can let me take you out."

"On a date?" I questioned, giving him a pondering look. "Sure. Why not?"

He choked on his bread and began coughing. He was reddening in the face, though I am not sure if he was embarrassed or begging for air. I patted him on the back until he sobered up. Slowly, he asked, "Are you serious?"

"I'll talk to you after your test." I kissed him on the cheek and left him sitting there. When I looked back, he was touching his face where I had kissed him. *How adorable*, I thought.

I waited outside the Great Hall for Dean, hoping he'd be done with his History test soon so we could talk. I was ready for this. He was a nice enough boy. I did like him. We did get along beautifully.

Bursting from the doors, Professor Tofty pulled Harry out of the testing area. Shaking Tofty's grip, they started arguing back and forth about visiting the hospital wing. When Harry mentioned a nightmare, I knew. He once again had a vision...

When he took off faster than I could react, I looked towards the Great Hall's open door and saw Dean waving at me. I closed my eyes in frustration. Harry was going to need help and I was going to volunteer. I didn't have much of a choice anyhow; he was my weakness.

It was Sirius. Harry had seen Sirius being attacked. Without even thinking twice, I offered my help and we quickly formulated a plan.

"You can't come down here!" I called to the crowd walking through Umbridge's hallway. A Second Year tried to walk past me and I put my hand on his chest. "No, sorry, you're going to have to go round by the swiveling staircase, someone's let off Garroting Gas just along here-"

"I can't see no gas..." said a Third Year.

"That's because it's colorless," I said, displaying my best annoyed voice, "but if you want to walk through it, carry on, then we'll have your body as proof for the next idiot who didn't believe us..."

Harry and Hermione slipped past me underneath the Invisibility Cloak. Hermione whispered, "Good one... don't forget the signal."

The corridor was deserted except for Luna at the other end. She stared absentmindedly towards the wall. Looking around, Neville had entered the hallway. I waved at him and motioned him over to me.

"Harry's fine," I said, answering the question he was obviously going to ask. I quickly explained to him what was going on.

"Sirius Black?" Neville gasped.

I swore to myself. I had forgotten he wasn't aware of Sirius's innocence. "Turns out everyone was wrong about Sirius. He was framed," I answered.

Neville shook his head in surprise. "Is he important to Harry?"

"Yes."

"Then he's important to me," he said. "What can I do to help?"

"We've been trying to buy him time, but I don't know how much longer we can do it," I said. "Umbridge isn't as daft as she looks."

Neville nodded. I admired his loyalty to Harry. The boy was turning into a real Gryffindor. Suddenly, his eyes expanded and he pointed behind me. "Ginny, duck!" He pushed me down, whipped out his wand, and pointed it towards whatever he had seen. "*Stupefy!*" he shouted, but the spell apparently missed.

"Neville, behind you!" I screamed and I crawled through his legs with my wand outstretched. In the distance, I saw Goyle holding Luna captive. Running towards Neville was Craven Warrington. I shouted, "*Impedimenta!*" but my aim, much like Neville's, was off tonight.

Warrington reached down his grubby hand and grabbed me by the hair. Writhing in pain, he lifted me to my feet, the silver / shimmering on his chest. The searing pain in my scalp was horrible. "Let GO!" I bellowed.

Neville's fist collided with the side of Warrington's face and he dropped me. Warrington made a sound and then he laughed. Extending his arms, he wrapped them completely around Neville and squeezed. Neville struggled but ultimately lost the battle.

Nursing my head, I groped for the wand I had dropped on the floor. A foot came down directly onto my fingers and I cried out in pain again. Looking up through watery eyes, Daphne Greengrass sneered down at me, wand pointed at my face. "Move and you won't see for a week."

The three Slytherins dragged us into Umbridge's office. Ron was dragged in by Crabbe as we entered the room. Hermione was in the corner being restrained by Millicent Bulstrode. Harry was standing beside the fire looking thunderstruck as Umbridge interrogated him. Draco leaned cockily against the wall, playing with the two wands that he had obviously confiscated from Hermione and Harry.

When Hermione sounded like she was about to break under pressure, I was dumbfounded. She was the last person I expected to squeal. Then she began chanting on and on about Dumbledore and the weapon and Umbridge bought it.

As soon as Hermione, Harry, and Umbridge had left the room, the four of us acted. I simply looked at Ron, glanced at Neville, then to Luna, and then nodded. Without even thinking, I stomped as hard as I could on Greengrass's toes. She dropped her wand and I slipped downwards. In the process, she grasped for me and her fingernails dug deep into my cheeks.

I grabbed her wand and did some quick spell work. Upwards and behind me, I caught Greengrass in the face with a *Stupefy* spell. As quickly as I uttered the jinx, I had the Bat-Bogey Hex locked on Draco. He stumbled into the wall as he tried to beat the winged creatures off and fell to the ground out cold.

Looking around the room, Neville was grinning; his eye looked like it was about to swell shut. Ron's lip was bleeding more than it had been when he entered the room. Luna, looking as if nothing strange had happened, sat innocently on the thick frame of Goyle, checking her fingernails.

"They're going into the Forest," Ron said, looking out the window.

The Golden Trio was determined not to allow the rest of us to go, but Neville was right. We were part of the DA as well. If it had all been a game to us, we would not have joined. Harry had always been like that, thinking that no one else should fight the powers of evil but him. Finally, they gave in, but mostly because they were not going to stop us from following.

We counted the shelves of the Hall of Prophecies as we ran past them.

95... 96....97...

No Sirius...

It had been a trap. A gang of Death Eaters lead by Lucius Malfoy had us cornered. We could not Apparate. We could not escape. We would have to...

...stall...

Harry kept Lucius talking, I think because he didn't know what else to do. For some reason, Voldemort wanted him there. For some reason, in the Department of Mysteries, we were going to die.

Side by side, we raised our wands towards the Death Eaters. Lucius called the ball a prophecy and wouldn't let the other Death Eaters touch us until it was safely in his possession. Harry kept them talking until each of us was ready and prepared to fight...

When we raised Dumbledore's Army, I'm not sure if anyone was really convinced we would have to fight Death Eaters. I couldn't imagine Lavender Brown dueling with Lucius without breaking down. I couldn't think of Dennis Creevey standing much of a chance against Bellatrix Lestrange. Hell, I couldn't even see myself living to tell the tale.

But there we were, in the Department of Mysteries, standing up against an enemy that supposedly did not exist.

Neville leaned ever so slightly to his right and whispered, "When Harry gives the signal, smash shelves." If I could have seen his face, I'd be willing to bet it was rigid and determined. I nodded to him, leaned slightly to my right and told Luna the same thing. Luna looked at me absentmindedly and smiled. She had never been the aggressive type and I hoped she was ready for this confrontation.

"NOW!"

“REDUCTO!” I shot my curse towards the glittering balls. Glass rained down upon us and shattered even further when connecting with the floor. Wispy figures of smoke sprung up all around us, the words they spoke fading into one another, blocking our view from the Death Eaters.

Harry ran past me. A second later, Ron grabbed my hand and Luna’s and pulled us after Harry. More and more prophecies fell around us. I threw my hands over my head to protect myself. We passed by Harry

In the chaos, the three of us lost Harry and the others. Ron pulled us through a hallway of two shelves. Tiptoeing through the valley of prophecy balls, I couldn’t help but look at the balls and their labels.

F.E.C. to H.M.B. Jesus of Nazareth. I remember hearing about him in Muggle Studies. Rumor had it that he had extraordinary powers that stumped even the greatest wizards of his day.

Shelves later, I read *T.V.G. to H.L.R. Adolf Hitler and Gellert Grindelwald.* Both names sounded familiar but I couldn’t place who they were.

Approaching the end of the row, I looked up at the shelf. “Muggle/Wizard Prophecies” was written on the end. Against the wall ahead of us was a door.

Cowering behind the shelves for protection, Ron peaked left around the corner. A curse missed his head by less than an centimeter. It surely would have killed him because the second one obliterated the door against the wall.

“Two of them!” Ron hissed, pointing in the way he had just looked. He motioned to run back down the hallway but stopped. Another Death Eater was at the end of the hallway. Looking right, a fourth Death Eater.

There was only one escape route and that was the room that had just been forcibly opened for us. From where we stood, it was completely dark, as if we would be stepping into nothingness. But there wasn’t any time to think.

“Get in the room!” Ron screamed, taking charge.

Luna and I raced towards the entrance, shooting hexes and spells left and right in hopes to blindly hit on of our pursuers. Curses missed us and I hoped they would accidentally hit their own people. Luna ran in first.

I looked quickly to make sure Ron was following. He had grabbed a ball glowing orange from the shelf and smashed it on the ground for cover. Running past me, he grabbed my shoulder and pulled me into the room.

Running was not an option because I found myself floating. Encased in blackness, I could barely see in front of my face. Immediately to the side was a small mass of rock. Ahead of me, I saw a giant mass of swirling gases. A large red spot spun on the circular mass and I recognized it as Jupiter’s Great Red Spot, a monstrous hurricane on the planet.

“The Solar System!” I heard Luna say. “And that’s Pluto!” She pointed next to us.

“GOT ONE!” came the scream of a Death Eater as he grabbed my ankle. I swore at him and tried to struggle free.

“*Reducto!*” Luna shouted. Pluto shattered beside us and the Death Eater cried out, letting go of my ankle. It ached horribly as we floated away from the oncoming Death Eaters.

She and Ron were becoming more and more visible as we neared Jupiter. Each of us were floating with no direction. Luna looked very calm, studying each planet as they came by us and saying some random fact about them that I was sure wasn’t true.

Ron took the time to calm down. He looked terrified but there was a fierce determination in his eyes to prove himself and to make sure that I got out of this alive. I gained a lot of respect for my brother that night.

I finally saw the door on the opposing side. “Over there!” I shouted. How to go? How to go? I willed myself to move and did so, followed

by Ron and Luna. As I reached the exit, gravity suddenly returned and we fell to the floor...

Crack

I felt my already-aching ankle collapse beneath me as I tried to stand. I cringed and clenched my jaw, attempting not to show weakness. On the ground, I cradled my ankle, trying to keep the damage to a minimum.

"We can't stay here!" Ron said, and at that moment, he was hit with a multi-colored light from above. Ron yelped but didn't fall. He rubbed his shoulder where it hit and said, "That's odd. It doesn't hurt."

I looked into the space above us. I could see no one, but heard several people talking. One of the Death Eaters must have thrown a curse in our direction in hopes of hitting one of us. If we didn't move, they would be here soon and we wouldn't have a chance to escape.

I stood and cringed even more. I hobbled on one foot towards the door and told the others to follow.

Ron started laughing. "Ginny..." he said through giggles. "Do you remember when you were eight? You got so mad at Mum that your clothes disappeared?" He laughed so hard that he fell to the floor rolling around in humor.

"Ron, shut up!" I hissed. I looked up towards the planets and could make out the distinct outlines of four people. "Luna, grab him and come on!"

Luna struggled under Ron's weight. Gasping for breath, he finally complied. Curses started breaking pieces off the wall as I opened the door. Falling through, the door slammed shut behind us. I felt my ankle roll beneath me again.

"Ginny? What happened?" It was Harry's voice but the pain in my ankle was far too excruciating. I leaned against the wall, slid down to a sitting position, and tried to nurse my ankle back to health. Unfortunately, I didn't know any spells to fix bones.

As Ron laughed, Luna explained our experiences to Neville and Harry. Hermione lay on Neville's shoulders and I noted again that he looked so different. I wondered for a quick second if Hermione was dead, but Neville noticed my concerned face and shook his head. "She's alive," he said.

Looking for a way out was impossible. We picked the wrong door and alerted all the Death Eaters where we were. Bellatrix had almost entered with us as the door closed. I could see Neville shaking at the sight of her.

We ran quickly into the Brain Room. Five Death Eaters found us just as quick. Things slowed down as Ron summoned one of the brains from the tank. The tentacles swiftly wrapped themselves around Ron.

"Harry, it'll suffocate him!"

And I don't know how it happened, but I blacked out. It must have been a stray spell from one of the Death Eaters. And I'm not sure how long I lay there on the cold floor.

--

I awoke in a daze. Standing above me was the face of someone I had not seen physically for years, not since my first year of Hogwarts. I recognized the face of Tom Riddle, the sixteen year old boy who originally opened the Chamber of Secrets and killed Moaning Myrtle.

I quickly looked around my surroundings. The basilisk lay on the floor dead, still bleeding from the killing blow Harry had given it. I was back in the Chamber of Secrets. How had I traveled so far from the Department of Mysteries?

"What a pleasure to see you awake, Ginny," Tom said.

"You're dead," I said.

"You know I have ways of returning." His skin fell away from him, and from beneath the robes, a snake emerged.

I screamed...

--

I sat up quickly and screamed aloud this time instead of from my dreams. Looking around, Ron was sitting there rocking back and forth laughing. The brain that had attacked him was motionless on the ground and I wondered how he had escaped its tentacles. Hermione still lay there and Luna looked as if she was just recovering from the curse that had sent her flying.

"Voldemort's here!" I cried. I shuddered for it had been the first time in my life that I used his name. It was poison on my lips. I wasn't sure if I'd ever manage to spit the foul name from my mouth again.

"Ha ha, what?" Ron said. The laughing hex was beginning to wear off. "How do you know...?"

"I don't know," I said. I had just felt it deep inside me. I could feel the air around me change. It was the Dark Lord and he had arrived at the Ministry of Magic.

The door burst open and Bellatrix ran through before I had a chance to even react. She was followed by Harry screaming at her. She tipped one of the brain tanks over but Harry in his fury had no trouble deflecting each of the brains.

"Harry- what-?" I called to him as he leapt over Luna, but he didn't stop. He continued through the door in search of Bellatrix.

Sirius Black did not die in vain.

By no means am I glad that Sirius met his demise in the Department of Mysteries. When Tonks found Ron, Luna, and me in the Brain Room later and explained to us what had happened, I cried so hard that I shook with the amount of tears that escaped my eyes.

As Tonks hugged me, she cried, too. Tough little Ginny and strong Auror Tonks wept into each others arms as we mourned one of the best men we had ever known.

I thought back to the summer. Sirius had found me multiple times in the kitchen late at night, fresh from a nightmare, and he would make

himself a cup of tea, and sit with me. He would tell me stories of his days at Hogwarts and I would laugh and I would smile and I would enjoy his company.

He was always so restless in that house. He would beg Dumbledore for a chance to stretch his legs and get some fresh air, but that couldn't happen. He was still a wanted criminal and a valuable asset to the Order. He couldn't leave. How he must have jumped immediately at the chance to aid the others to the Ministry of Magic. His godson had been led into a trap and sorry, Dumbledore, he wasn't going to sit this one out.

Most would say our Battle inside the Ministry was fruitless. We had been led into an ambush for the sole reason of the Prophecy. But I know different. Had it not been for the quick acts of Harry, Voldemort might still have had control of our world today.

We opened the eyes of the Ministry. We fought an enemy that supposedly did not exist anymore. We fought an adversary that couldn't possibly have returned. We stood up against an evil force when *no one else would*. Six teenagers were willing to go into a war sooner and more eagerly than the Ministry of Magic itself.

I finally understood what Sirius and Dad had been talking about. I should have realized it when I saw Neville visiting his parents at St. Mungo's. I should have realized it when Harry faced Voldemort in his first year. I should have realized it when Tom Riddle possessed me. We were more than children, more than teenagers, we were soldiers. And it was then that I realized that there were things worth dying for. I think everyone else realized it that night as well.

No, Sirius Black did not die in vain.

Harry was once again very distant. This time, I could understand. None of us had lost anyone close to us. Hermione wanted Harry to talk about Sirius but he wasn't ready. Ron refused to even acknowledge what had happened to him, and I knew that wasn't the right approach. I certainly didn't know what to say to him.

So there Harry was, running around from location to location, trying his best to avoid the hard truth and realization that his godfather was

gone. Anytime the subject came close, Harry made up an excuse to visit someone else and was gone.

Luna was helping me pack the day before we left Hogwarts. She and I were quickly becoming closer. It's difficult to not let something like that happen when you almost die together. And that's a good thing, too. Delia had officially told me she was not returning for next year. She had found Muggle education appealed to her more, something she called Senior School.

"Have you found your things yet?" I asked Luna, who handed me some clothing out of my wardrobe. I stuffed the shirts into my trunk.

"Not yet," she said. "I think I'll put up some more signs tonight." I had helped her earlier today to decorate Gryffindor Tower and Ravenclaw Tower with her papers. There had been an uncomfortable moment there when I saw Michael and Cho walking hand in hand down the spiral stairwell.

"Do you want some more help?"

"It's only a couple more signs. I'll miss dinner but I might make it for pudding," Luna said. I hated the way everyone picked on her. I might have thought she was crazy when I was younger but I had never teased her. In my opinion, she was better than most people at this school. "How is your ankle?" she asked.

I lifted my foot and wiggled it around in multiple directions. "Just fine," I answered.

"If only Madam Pomfrey had something for Harry," she said. "He seems to feel it was his fault that Stubby Boardman fell through the Veil."

"Stubby Boardman?" I repeated. I searched my thoughts and remembered that Luna had called Sirius by that title. "He thinks it was his fault because Sirius was his godfather."

"Really?" Luna asked, looking heartbroken. "That's why he's so sad." She handed me a pile of socks from the dresser. "Why won't he talk to anybody?"

"He's like that," I answered, finding a place for my socks. "But I don't think any of us would know what to say." I really did want to talk to Harry. I really did want to comfort him.

"Oh, it's simple really," Luna said. "He'll see Stubby again someday. We all will." She looked towards the dresser and wardrobe and realized that all my clothes were packed. She added, "Just like I'll see my Mum again."

After knowing Luna all those years, I hadn't known she had lost her Mum. I made a note to really get to know the girl next term. "I'm sorry, Luna. I didn't know." She smiled at me and didn't say anything. I added, "I bet Harry would like to hear that."

"I'm sure he would," Luna replied thoughtfully. "If I see him later, I'll be sure to say hello." She looked out the window and exclaimed, "I think I see one of my socks!" Sure enough, one of her socks was fluttering in the wind.

She ran to the window and opened it. "*Accio sock!*"

One blue and pink sock flew into her hands. She dug into her pockets and pulled out a copy of the *Quibbler* and the matching sock to the one she had just found. "I found the other one in the lake earlier. I wonder how it got there."

I shrugged. I thought how cruel some people could be. Surely someone had hidden her socks in precarious places to be mean. Luna said farewell and went to leave but I pointed to the magazine that she had placed on my bed. "You forgot this..."

"You can keep it," she said, her eyes twinkling. "Dad showed me most of it last month anyhow. There's a quiz in there you might like, though I already know how your quiz ends."

"You do?"

"I pretended I was you." She waved again and left my dormitory.

On the front cover was a picture of a man with a surprised look on his face. The title of the article read "*Is this man He-Who-Must-Not-Be-*

Named? More inside." I opened to the table of contents, skipping through the list of articles until I found the quiz.

"Who Are You Destined For? A quiz created by world renown Seer Clarence Claybotter to accurately find your soul mate."

I thought back to the night in Ravenclaw Tower, a day before Michael and I broke up. Luna had been talking about the three guys in my life that I was interested in. She didn't like Michael, she liked Dean, and she said about Harry: *I think you're destined for each other.* I placed the magazine in my bag and planned to check that out later.

As I walked towards the Hogsmeade station with Luna, Dean caught up with me. As we walked side by side, he asked me if I was alright and complimented my bravery for going to the Ministry of Magic. Then he asked the one thing that had been on his mind, I'm sure, for some time.

"Ginny," he said, not using his affectionate little nickname he had given me. "I *do* fancy you. If you were serious about dating me, I'd like to..."

I caught a glance of Harry boarding the train and noticed how depressed he looked. I can't express how badly I wanted to be the one to comfort him and give him a reason to hope again, but I knew there nothing I could do for him. Harry had far too much on his mind to worry about Ginny Weasley's silly crush (although I was convinced it was much stronger than that by now). It was wrong, I concluded, to even consider winning Harry's heart when it had just been shattered by the death of the most important man in his life.

No, once again, it wasn't time to focus my efforts on Harry.

So much had happened between then and now. I was serious about giving a relationship with Dean a tryout and I *did* want to see where it could go. Could I be with him after something so character testing? Would he even be able to understand?

I looked back at Dean and smiled. "I'd like to give it a shot." I kissed him on the cheek. "But I can't sit with you today. They..." and I knew

he understood who I meant. "...need me... and I need to be with them."

I needed to be with them on the ride home because very few others in the school understood the implications of our battle, that very few people understood that there were things worth fighting for, things worth sacrificing everything for...

That there were things worth *dying for*.

Chapter Ten: Becoming the Chosen One

Though the truth was harder to swallow than a stray dungbomb, the Ministry was forced to open their eyes and acknowledge that certain events, the Azkaban breakout, Bertha Jorkin's disappearance, and Cedric Diggory's death to name a few, had been the direct result of Voldemort's return.

And most significantly, Harry "*I-Shall-Not-Tell-Lies*" Potter had been apparently telling the truth all along.

It didn't take a Seer to understand what our battle at the Ministry meant. If the prophecy was so important that Voldemort risked exposure to acquire it, then it obviously foretold something of immense proportions. *The Daily Prophet* caught on as well and deemed the Boy-Who-Lived as the Chosen One.

Although I couldn't be sure what was true and what was fabricated, I was convinced it had to be something like that. If anyone knew the reality of the situation, it would be Dumbledore, and I was positive the Headmaster would tell Harry straightaway, especially in light of current events.

Voldemort was unusually quiet during Harry's sixth year. It was apparent when looking back that he refused to act until Dumbledore, the only one he ever feared, was out of the picture. That might have been the biggest mistake Voldemort made. With the hesitation, he allowed Dumbledore to pass vital information to Harry that he needed for victory. It also allowed Harry the opportunity to finally find someone, namely me, that he could love and cherish and be happy with, and when the time came, provide him with something worth fighting for and the hope of a happy life when it was all over.

I couldn't tell you the exact moment that Harry fell for me, but he'd gladly say that he always loved me. Could it have been when he invited me to Hogsmeade in October? Or before that when he wanted to sit with me on the train? Or it might have even been during the summer when we spent every day together? Whenever the moment Harry fell, his love for me slowly crept up upon him, jumping out from nowhere, and surprising even him, I'm sure.

I don't regret being with Michael. He taught me a lot when it came to relationships and I wouldn't trade my time with him. I don't regret being with Dean. He was a wonderful boy, but by the time we broke up, I realized how much I liked being his friend rather than his girlfriend. Neither of them were mistakes, just learning experiences preparing me for who I was destined to be with.

Love, the power that the Dark Lord knew not, was in oversupply after Voldemort returned. Mum said it was just like last time, couples running off in droves to get married, my parents included. The first in our family to follow the trend was my eldest brother Bill.

Bill came home to the Burrow a week after school ended with the Beauxbatons champion Fleur Delacour. He explained that they had been spending a lot of time together and he had been giving her private "Eenglish" lessons. Seeing her standing there in my kitchen with her unnatural beauty, I thought, *Private English lessons, my arse.*

I was not the only one in my family curious as to why, as a tutor, he brought his student home to meet his family. After a few moments, Bill finally answered all our questions and announced that they would be getting married next summer.

"Oh, you are going to be my leetle seester!" Fleur exclaimed, rushing towards me. In a swift embrace, she scooped me up in her French arms. "You and Gabrielle are going to get along zo well! You must bee about ze zame age."

When she set me down, I smoothed the wrinkles from my shirt. "How old is Gabrielle?"

"She iz ten."

"I'm almost fifteen," I replied, annoyed. I took a quick glance at my body. Did I really look like I was five years younger than I was? Nope, certain feminine attributes still intact. With a strand of hair in my hand, I looked towards Fleur and gave her a disgruntled look.

She didn't catch on. "You are zo beautiful, Geeny!"

Already not liking her, I said, "It's pronounced Ginny." When Mum shot me an angry look, I ignored her. "How do you pronounce your name again?" I asked in my sarcastic expertise. "Floor? Flour? *Phlegm*?"

But Fleur did not notice that I was making fun of her. She spent the next ten minutes helping me pronounce her name and I entertained myself by coming back to the pronunciation *phlegm*. Even Mum tried not to be amused.

When Fleur distracted Mum, I quickly escaped the company of my future sister-in-law, leaving a smitten Ron at the table. I slipped outside, wishing that Fred and George had not moved out earlier that year, although I was proud that their joke shop was flourishing.

I found Dad and Bill talking in the garden. Coming around the corner of the house, I stopped out of sight to listen in.

"Are you sure about this, Bill? How long have really known each other?" Dad asked.

"Longer, I think, than you and mother dated before you got married," Bill said, amusement in his voice.

Dad was silent. After a few seconds, he answered, "That was a different time. Your mother and I were meant to be."

Bill laughed. "Different times? You and I are living in the same world two decades apart," Bill said. "I love Fleur very much."

More silence. When I decided to reveal myself, I turned the corner and saw Dad and Bill hug and shake each other's hand. "Then you have my blessing," Dad said. He clapped my brother on the back and left the garden they were walking through.

Bill smiled when he saw me and when I came closer, he scooped me up in his arms and embraced me. I liked this much more than when Fleur had done the same. Bill's arms felt safe and familiar. He smelt like the familiar woody aroma of the Burrow, despite not having lived there for years.

"It's good to have you home," I said as he set me back down on the ground. "How long are you staying?"

"I'm only here until tomorrow," Bill answered. I assumed Fleur was leaving with him but he dashed my dreams. "Fleur will be coming back later this month for a proper visit."

I silently cringed. "Really?" I tried to sound excited.

"She has to get to know her new family," Bill replied. He went into a long story explaining how they had caught each other's eye during the Triwizard Tournament and then how they worked together at Gringotts. He began talking about how amazing she was and I couldn't help but notice how much he loved talking about her.

"You really love her, don't you?" I asked.

"Very much," he answered. "You know, we want you to be in the wedding."

"I better not be the flower girl," I retorted. I could take Fleur mistaking my age but I refused to hold a child's position during the wedding.

"You would look adorable spreading the rose petals," Bill teased.

I tried my hardest to give Fleur a chance during her stay with us. I held my tongue when she bought me dolls. I didn't say anything when she talked to me like I was five. By the time Hermione arrived, I was desperate for a getaway. When she came through our door, I practically flattened her with glee.

Dragging her to my room, I threw her on the bed and forced her to listen to my transgressions involving the soon-to-be newest member of my family. She grinned at me and remarked, "Can she really be that bad?"

"You have no idea!" I shouted. If I was going to recruit her for my cause, I needed something drastic. "You should see the way Ron gushes over her."

She scowled and I knew she was on my side.

"Speaking of Ron," I said, not very eager to talk any more of the horrid phlegm that was living in my house. "When can I start picking out my bridesmaid dress for your wedding?"

She blushed slightly. "Ron and I..." she started. "We... oh... I don't know!" She crossed her arms in front of her chest. "I'm certainly not going to make the first move."

"And you shouldn't," I agreed, "but you've been researching the problem for how long now? Isn't it obvious how much you care for each other?"

"Who cares for who?" Ron had just entered the room, munching on an apple. He stood there in the doorway, utterly oblivious to the fact that we had just been discussing him.

Hermione looked at me for a cover-up. "Me and Dean," I quickly said. "We were talking about how I care about Dean."

Ron swallowed the bit of apple that he was chewing. "When I told you choose someone better, I wasn't referring to Dean Thomas."

"And what's wrong with Dean?" I asked huffily.

"Nuffin," he said with apple in his mouth. When he swallowed, he continued, "He's a nice bloke, but I don't think I can allow you..."

"*Allow me?*" I hissed. "Ronald Weasley, you are in no position to *allow* me to do anything." I stepped closer to him, my brown eyes boring holes through him.

"I..." Ron said, backing up. "I just think you need someone better..."

"And *who* exactly does my genius of a brother have in mind?" I hollered at him, thinking back to the train ride home when he has instructed me to choose someone better. He had looked at Harry when he said this. I had been curious about that look for weeks now.

"Just..." Ron said, not knowing if he should continue or change the subject. "I... think Harry and... well... you've fancied him... and..."

“Ron,” I said flatly, “I’m over Harry.”

“You shouldn’t give up so soon,” he said, more confident that I had regained my composure. “He’s noticing you a lot more lately. I think you’re perfect for each other, just he doesn’t know it yet.”

“Ha ha.” I grinned at him, to Hermione, and then back at him. I couldn’t help myself when I said, “Reminds me of someone else I know.”

Ron, looking quite confused, was about to respond when Hermione, looking quite embarrassed, spoke up at last and guided the conversation in a new direction. “So Harry will be here tomorrow then?”

Ron’s face lit up. “Blimey, I almost forgot. He’s off with Dumbledore, isn’t he?”

“Do you think he’s telling him about the prophecy?” I asked Hermione quietly, dreading the answer. Ron and I had already discussed our theories on the whole ordeal and we were both interested in what Hermione had to say.

Hermione looked just as worried as I did and I wondered if she already knew exactly what the prophecy foretold. “After everything Lucius said about the prophecy...” she said slowly. “And Voldemort wanting to hear it so badly...” She sighed heavily. “It has to say something about his defeat...”

“*The Daily Prophet’s* been saying Harry is the Chosen One,” Ron informed Hermione. She nodded and confirmed that she had been reading it daily. “The one who can defeat You-Know-Who.”

We sat in silence for the next few minutes before Mum called us down for dinner. Walking together, the same thing was running through each of our minds. Dinner that night for the three of us felt like a last meal we’d ever have, for food would never taste quite the same if we learned that Harry really was the Chosen One.

Harry arrived an hour after midnight. After eating breakfast, Mum informed us that Harry was sleeping in the twins’ old bedroom. Ron

and Hermione rushed out of the kitchen and up the stairs. I stayed one second too late to finish my juice. Mum asked me to stay with her while she prepared Harry's breakfast and then I could take it up.

"We can both take eet up to 'im, I theenk," Fleur said, seemingly excited to see the boy that had beaten her a year ago. "Would that be fun, Geeny?"

Dear Merlin, I thought, it's pronounced Ginny! And I'm not bloody four years old!

"Ginny can manage on her own," Mum said sweetly.

Fleur began to fix up the tray and Mum turned her attention to her. I quickly slipped out before anyone noticed I was gone. I cringed as I heard Mum telling her not to cook the eggs *that way*. I hurried up the stairs, hoping I had not missed anything of importance.

My bliss without Fleur was short-lived. I had barely been in the room when Fleur entered and delivered Harry's breakfast to him. Her entrance was swift and her exit was desired. When Mum finally left, the four of us were finally able to converse.

When Mum called me down to help her in the kitchen, I swore under my breath. She only wanted someone else so she wouldn't have to be alone with Fleur. I wanted to be with the Trio and learn more of what Harry had been up to in the last couple of weeks.

When I left the spare room, I didn't go down to the kitchen immediately. Though Hermione was the only part of the Trio who saw fit to pass me information, I knew that they still had that nasty habit of keeping me in the dark despite how I had proved myself worthy time and time again. I figured they would take the opportunity of being alone to discuss certain things. And if they weren't going to provide me with the information, I would have to do what I did best.

The first thing I heard was "What's this?" coming from Hermione. I smiled coyly to myself and thought of the telescope I had borrowed from the twins. I had strategically placed the joke item in there. I figured Harry could use the laugh after such a devastating loss.

Although I had expected Ron to be the curious one instead of Hermione, I braced myself for the impact of the tiny fist.

Instead, they discussed the joke shop and Percy. After a few moments, I figured that they weren't going to talk about it, but then Harry mentioned about his future private lessons with Dumbledore and my interest was revived.

I listened intently; they had reached the subject of the prophecy. My heart raced. A bead of sweat fell from my forehead. I dared not breathe because I swore they would hear me.

"The *Prophet* got it right," Harry said, and my heart sank. I slowly slid down the wall, making only the slightest sound. "It looks like I'm the one who's got to finish off Voldemort... at least, it said neither of us could live while the other survives."

There it was. Harry's destiny laid out flatly inside my house, the words lingering quietly on the rafters, and drifting through my mind like I had been told someone had died. It was true. Harry really was the Chosen One. In the end, it was going to be either Voldemort or Harry, and not both...

"It's about time," Mum said to me as I finally entered the kitchen. "I was about to call for you again...." She turned to me and gasped, dropping the jug of water she had been carrying. "What's wrong, Ginny?"

If I looked like I felt, I'm sure I would have been worried, too. I touched my cheeks with the palm of my hand and felt how cold and clammy it was. Looking back at Mum, I remarked, "Nothing."

"I theenk she just needs zome good food," Fleur said, magically chopping up vegetables. Most of the pieces were flying over the floor instead of staying on the table.

"I told you I'd get that!" Mum said as nice as she possibly could, but it was difficult to hide her annoyance. She sighed heavily and with a flick of her wand, the water she had spilled was cleaned up and the vegetable pieces were back on the counter.

I was grateful for the distraction. I did not feel like making something up to disguise why I was sick to my stomach. I ran the words through my head again: *Neither of us can live while the other survives.*

Hermione came rushing into the kitchen asking about any Owls. I forgot my dread for the time being when I saw her face. Her eye was black; she had fallen for the bait. I couldn't suppress a giggle.

"You're laughing, too?" Hermione asked. I sincerely hoped that Harry had gotten a kick out the telescope. He needed the good-natured pranks more now than ever.

Mum quickly found her copy of *The Healer's Helpmate* and tried to remove the bruising but to no avail. When Harry entered the kitchen with his breakfast tray, I saw the amusement on his face and I knew that I had succeeded, if only a little bit.

"It'll be Fred and George's idea of a funny joke, making sure it can't come off," I said casually, playing the innocent party. I caught another smirk coming from Harry's direction. *Ginny, you are on a roll today.*

And I continued to be on a roll the rest of summer break. I made it my personal goal to cause Harry to smile at least three times a day. To be honest, I had a special talent for making him grin. Some days I would lose count of the amount of chuckles I was able to conjure from the Chosen One.

Ron and I had been taking on the team of Hermione and Harry usually every night of the week out at our Quidditch pitch. Hermione should stick to the books, honestly, she's dreadful on a broom. Without the pressure of a real game, Ron actually looked impressive. Of course, Harry, as the newly-named captain of the Gryffindor team, tried his best not to leave us in the dust.

Since there were only four of us playing, we used only the Quaffle and for the most part, we were evenly matched. I don't want to say that I rivaled Harry's ability but I certainly gave him a run for his gold.

After a long couple hours one August night, our teams had come to a stalemate. Every time Harry would score, I would come back and

score, too. I would fly little circles around him, letting him know that I had his number.

Ron dismounted his broom after the third hour and maybe the thousandth time that we were tied. "I call it quits," he said. "Besides there's some cake inside that Mum made and I think I hear it calling me."

Hermione carefully dismounted her broom, too. She looked tired and worn out. She hobbled next to Ron and said, "For once, he's right. I'm exhausted."

Harry and I remained on our brooms and floated towards the ground in disappointment. It had been the first time since we started our games that I was evenly matched with Harry and I think he enjoyed the challenge. I couldn't be sure if he was having an off night or I was improving.

"We haven't won yet, Ron," I said, casting a challenging look towards Harry. "I think I need another five minutes to out fly the Captain."

Harry grinned and my tally was up to fifteen today. "Yeah, c'mon, Ron," he said. "How about it?"

Ron remained steadfast and held his stomach. "I'm tuckered out," he said and then he pointed towards the box with the rest of the balls. "But there's an easy way to settle this."

I gave Ron an approving look. "The Snitch Run!" I said, excitedly.

Hermione repeated what I said curiously. "What is that?"

"Charlie and Bill used to settle arguments this way," Ron replied. He opened the box, placed the Quaffle in its appropriate place, and lifted the Snitch from its container. "Whoever catches the Snitch wins."

"Winner takes all!" I said eagerly. I had never been allowed to play Quidditch with my older brothers, especially the twins and Ron, since they didn't think I even knew how to mount a broom. "How about it, Harry?"

Harry nodded and looked just as excited as I did. Turning to me, he said, "I'll do it."

"But you have to get rid of your Firebolt," I complained. "If you stay on that thing, I might as well just hand you the Snitch."

Harry floated to the ground and exchanged his broom for Ron's. As he returned to the air, he said, "I remember being on Ron's broom yesterday and still beating you."

"I'll have you know that the sun was in my eyes!" I said, pointing a finger at him in mock anger.

Ron motioned for us to come down beside him. I landed to Ron's left and Harry on his right. Ron held the Snitch up in his hand and said, "First one to capture the Snitch for their team wins tonight's game. I will count to three and release the Snitch. There will be no hitting, punching, biting, hair pulling, pushing, snogging-"

"RON!" I shrieked.

He grinned coyly. "Right," he said, clearing his throat. "... one... two... THREE!" He let go of the golden ball and the little thing rocketed upwards.

Harry and I were immediately into the air and following the glint of gold. Neither one of us had the advantage so side by side we raced. I laughed aloud and stole a glance at Harry. He looked so free with the wind in his face, his hair sticking straight out, and a look of determination in his eyes. *You're not beating me today, Harry!*

He glanced to his left at me and we locked eyes for several seconds. With the wind billowing in my hair, I felt a certain sensation wash over me that I had grown so familiar with. Without a moment's hesitation, Harry said, "It's mine!" He cut me off and sped towards the left.

I swore. I should have been watching for the ball, not making eyes at someone who wasn't my boyfriend, even if he was Harry. I thought Harry was looking at me when in reality, he must have been following the Snitch's path. I mentally smacked myself.

Recovering from the mistake, I followed Harry as fast as I could. Ahead the Snitch glistened in the setting sun. I was too slow to catch up and Harry's hand was outstretched, his grasp only inches away.

The interesting thing about the Weasley Quidditch set is that it's rather old. I don't think we've had a new one since before Charlie was born so you can imagine how the magic has worn over the years. The Quaffle sometimes doesn't have the sticking power it should. The Bludgers don't fly as far as they used to. And the Golden Snitch? It tends to make an unexpected left turn when being chased.

I flew left. Just as Harry's hand was about to close, the Snitch followed me, right into my waiting palm. I heard Ron cheer in triumph below and I flew towards the ground, Snitch held high and beaming.

Harry landed beside me. "Sneaky little trick," he muttered, but he was obviously amused. "You knew it was going to do that, didn't you?"

"Maybe," I said throwing my hair around my shoulders. "You have to be prepared for anything... defective Snitches, even your occasional bewitched, Harry-seeking Bludgers..."

He nodded, remembering how Dobby had sabotaged one of his second year Quidditch games. "Don't forget dark wizards trying to throw you off your brooms..."

"Or dementors," I added.

"You're trying out for the team, aren't you?" he asked hopefully. "I could definitely use you as a Chaser."

"I was thinking of trying out for Seeker," I teased.

Harry's eyes twinkled as he enjoyed our playful banter. From the looks of it, he thoroughly enjoyed taking and receiving the mickey. It appeared to be a new discovery for him since his female interaction was limited. There was Hermione, but I doubt he viewed her as anything other than a sister. There was Cho, but she barely was happy enough to make a joke around. There was me, and I seemed to be doing a wonderful job keeping the boy on his toes.

“What do you think, Ron?” he asked my brother, but when we turned to address him, both Ron and Hermione were gone. He frowned and wondered aloud, “Where did they run off to?”

We had been so immersed in each other’s company that neither of us had noticed the disappearance of our best friends. For the first time, I realized how much Harry seemed to enjoy himself with me, and for the first time all summer, a thought entered the back of my mind, *maybe Dean was a mistake...*

Taking my free hand, I stuck it into the messed up tangle of Harry’s hair and ruffled his locks. “Come on, Captain. Let’s put the brooms away and go inside.”

The crowds at Diagon Alley were scarce this year and understandably so. The news of Voldemort’s return had spread quickly. Florean Forescue’s ice cream shop had been deserted and Ollivander, the best wand maker in England, had disappeared. The only place that seemed to have any kind of hope that day was my brothers’ joke shop.

Sitting on my bed hours later with my new Pygmy Puff, I contemplated the events of our visit. The twins had given me an unusually hard time concerning my dating life, but that wasn’t what was on my mind. While discussing my current and past boyfriends, I noticed Harry was unusually attentive for something so insignificant to him.

“What’re you thinking about?” Hermione said, entering our room and noticing my inner turmoil. She set herself on the bed with a new book she had purchased earlier that day.

“Nothing,” I answered, not really knowing how to explain what I was feeling.

Hermione studied my face for a second before saying anything else. “What’s that?” she said, pointing to the paper I had been holding in my hands.

I looked at it despite knowing exactly what it was. “A letter from Dean,” I answered. “He wants to sit with me on the train.” I folded the

letter up and placed it into the drawer beside my bed. "He said he really misses me."

"Do you miss him?"

"Of course I miss him," I answered. I wasn't lying, but I felt ashamed that I didn't miss him as I knew that I should be. I wanted to see him as a friend would want to see another friend, not as a girlfriend would want to see her boyfriend.

"You and Harry seem to be getting along quite well this summer," Hermione said innocently. So she hadn't been too caught up in her "relationship" with Ron to notice that Harry had been treating me far different than he had before.

Although I was delighted to experience the change in this attitude towards me, I was not ready to admit that it meant anything more than a friendly adjustment in our relations. Besides, just because he enjoyed spending time with me and listened in when I spoke of Michael and Dean was not reason enough to think he had fallen head over heels in love with me. I was not arrogant.

Hermione and I had spent too much time talking about the subject and I was convinced that recent events did not warrant further discussion. I opted to guide the conversation differently.

"Speaking of Harry," I said, "where did you three run off to while Mum was buying me Arnold." The purple puff hopped up and down behind me on the bed, seemingly aware that I had just spoken its name.

"Harry suspects Malfoy is up to something," Hermione answered. "We followed him to Borgin and Burkes. It was suspicious, of course, but I don't think we have to worry."

"Harry is usually pretty perceptive of these things," I replied.

"No, he's not," Hermione said. She listed off all the innocent people Harry had suspected during their five years at Hogwarts. "He thought Snape was trying to steal the Sorcerer's Stone, he thought Karkaroff might be trying to kill him, he thought Umbridge was a Death Eater, and even suspected Malfoy to be the Heir of Slytherin..."

"I get it," I cut her off, trying to find a way to save Harry's suspicions. "Maybe V-Voldemort..." I had been trying to use the name since we escape unscathed from the Ministry. "...is pissed that Lucius failed and is passing the torch to Draco."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Oh God, you sound just like Harry."

"But wouldn't it make sense?" I asked. "Voldemort really wanted to hear that prophecy." I eyed her up, looking to see her reaction. "It *did* smash before Harry heard it, right?"

Hermione once again studied my face and shook her head. "You know, don't you?"

I nodded and the mood changed in the room. I had not thought about the depressing fate that Harry was forced to face. I had stored the news in the back of my mind and distracted myself with the events of the summer, thinking that if I could keep him here, maybe it wouldn't be true.

"I'm scared," I whispered.

"Me, too," she replied.

I wiped the growing water from the corners of my eyes. Hermione looked as if she was about to cry, too. I placed my arms around her and let her cry into my shoulder as I refused to allow myself to let more tears shed over the matter.

Though the nightmares were pleasantly absent from my sleep schedule for two months, they invited themselves back into my mind on the last night before Hogwarts began. It was a vicious dream and I awoke in my usual cold sweat.

Hermione stirred, but did not wake. Her slumber must have been deep since she usually was fine-tuned to my nightmare patterns. Unlike Delia, Hermione never grew accustomed to my problem and never failed to be by my side except for his particular night, and that's because fate might have been playing a hand tonight.

Light filtered in through the window, signaling the approaching dawn. Returning to my dreams never seemed enticing after horrid nighttime images and since we would be leaving in a few short hours, I didn't fancy myself trying to go back to sleep.

As I've done so many times before, I shoved the covers off my body. I managed to find a pair of slippers beneath my bed, but they weren't the ones I normally wore. I pulled a robe over my pyjamas and tiptoed out of the room, careful not to disturb Hermione or anyone else that was still asleep in the house. I quietly took each step to the lower floors, through the kitchen, and out the door to the back porch.

Just as I have a Hogwarts place to sort out my emotions, I have one at home as well. On the back porch, there's a swing that overlooks the valley. When the sun rises over the hill and hits our house, it's picture perfect. Being alone there soothes my troubled mind.

Except I wasn't alone. Exiting the back door, I stopped. There I was standing in my housecoat, hair mostly disheveled, and wearing pony slippers. There, sitting upon the swing, was Harry, staring at my slippers and grinning.

Well, I thought, there's number one for the day.

He motioned for me to have a seat next to him. Studying his face, his cheeks were damp and his eyes were red. He was quiet when I sat down. The only noise was the creak of the swing as it swayed beneath my added weight.

"Why are you up so early?" he asked softly, breaking our silence and quieting the chirping crickets.

"Couldn't sleep," I muttered. I stared into the horizon, watching more of the sun reveal itself. The sky was dancing with vivid colors of red and orange. It was beautiful and I might have appreciated it more if I hadn't just escaped a nightly terror. I saved him the trouble of asking my reasons for lack of rest and said, "Nightmare."

"I know what that's like," he said. "Do you want to talk about it?"

“Not much to tell you that you don’t already know,” I said, looking at him now. “You’ve already saved me from it once.”

“You dream about the Chamber still?” he asked innocently.

“All the time,” I said. I relaxed in Harry’s presence, noting that we had never spoken to each other about the events of my first year. What a shame that it took me so long to be sitting here with him and talking to him like this.

Continuing, I said, “When Riddle comes to me at night, I feel so... so violated.” I shuddered when I thought that I had not even talked to Hermione like this. Sighing, I asked Harry, “Why did you come after me?”

Harry’s eyebrows moved slightly in a curious way. “I just did what anyone would have done.”

Shaking my head, I patted Harry on the knee and asked, “You don’t honestly believe Malfoy would have come after me, do you?”

He grinned again. *Number two*. “I guess not.”

“For whatever reason you came after me, I don’t think I ever thanked you.”

“Ginny, you don’t have to...”

“*I know*,” I said, cutting him off. Even at his young age of 16, he was the same modest man I would later marry, never taking credit for the things he was able to accomplish. *Always lucky*, he would claim. “But I am...” I smiled at him sweetly. “Thank you for being my hero.”

He sat there awkwardly.

I nudged him playfully. “This is the part where you say *you’re welcome*,” I whispered with my hand shielding my mouth from the eavesdroppers that weren’t there.

“I just don’t want you to think I’m bragging because...”

"You're not," I finished for him.

"Exactly," Harry said softly.

We sat there for another couple minutes without saying anything. It was a comforting silence, something he and I were always able to enjoy. The stillness we would later share as a couple always felt right, and was more meaningful to me than five conversations with Dean.

I broke the silence when it felt appropriate. "You asked me what I was doing out here," I said, "but you never told me what your reasons for being up so early."

"The same," he replied, though I didn't expect him to elaborate. Nightmares were a regular occurrence with him as well. Imagine my surprise when he did go on. "I keep seeing Sirius falling through the veil and..."

He stopped before saying anything else, but I had a feeling I knew what he was thinking. He was thinking how it was his fault that Sirius was dead, how it was his fault that Cedric had died, how it was his fault that his parents had died, and how, in the end, he would have to face Voldemort as the Chosen One and kill him, or die in the process.

"It's not your fault," I said to him. "It's his. That's what it comes down to, Harry. There's no one to blame but V-Voldemort. You didn't choose this life. It was chosen for you."

"As long as he lives, everyone I love will die."

My insides turned icy because of what he was implying. My eyes darted towards his hand and I felt the sudden strong urge to hold it, and I was strangely confident that he would have allowed me. Although my intentions were purely innocent, I held back because I wasn't sure if I'd be able to separate the romance from the friendship. Instead, I leaned closer and carefully placed my head on against his shoulder.

"Then I'm glad you're still here to protect me," I whispered to him.

More silence followed, sweet comforting serenity, time to take what was just said and process it. The sun was higher now and the morning dew was beginning to evaporate into the pinks and yellows.

“Do you remember how you could never talk to me, Ginny?” he asked, breaking the silence himself this time.

All the colors of the sunrise had faded into the wild blue above us. My head was placed strategically on his shoulder, the swing creaked as it swayed forwards and backwards, and I sighed heavily to myself. Breathing in his scent, I thought to myself for the second time that summer: *Dean was a mistake.*

Thinking about his statement to me, I didn't say anything but merely nodded. *How could I forget, Harry?*

Quietly, he said. “I'm glad you got over that.”

We sat together on the swing, talking, laughing, reminiscing, and sharing. Something odd was happening with Harry, and I was determined to keep an eye out for whatever that was. Not that I needed another excuse to keep Harry in sight. When the first sound came from the kitchen, we went inside and got ready for the train ride.

“Fancy trying to find a compartment?” Harry asked me on the train after Ron and Hermione went on Prefect duties.

“I can't,” I said, trying hard not to read into his request as more than what it was. After all, last term I had saved his lonesome self and dragged him into a compartment with Neville and Luna. He must have been trying to repay the favor. Despite my reasoning, I explained, “I said I'd meet Dean. See you later.”

Disappointed, I turned from him with a swing of my hair. I could *feel* his eyes watching me leave. I dared not turn back. It was time to stop interacting with Harry so much and start interacting with my boyfriend, who I had not seen all summer, and who I was supposed to drastically miss.

Wandering from compartment window to compartment window, I peered inside each one, looking for Dean. Nearing the end of the

corridor, I leaned into the window to check and saw Zacharias Smith sitting with his friends. I cringed at the sight of the foul boy and backed up.

Two hands covered my eyes. "I'll give you two guesses," the hand's owner said. "But I bet you'll only need one, Little Sis."

Grabbing his hands, I spun around in a position where he was hugging me instead of hiding my eyes. "Back to being Ron's Little Sister, am I?"

"Of course not," Dean replied, locking his dark eyes with me. He leaned a bit closer and planted a small kiss on my lips, the first actual kiss we had shared, despite dating for the last two months. I'm sure he had been itching to do that all summer.

After careful inspection, I was relieved that Dean Thomas did not resemble Harry Potter in any way, shape, or form. The hair was the same color, but fundamentally different. The eyes were completely different shades. And Dean was significantly darker than Harry. Nope, I wouldn't expect to see a lightning bolt shaped scar on his forehead. For this, I grinned mischievously.

He pulled me into his compartment. Seamus sat there waiting for us. Across the small aisle, Lavender and Parvati sat there, too, happy to see me in their compartment. I greeted each of the Gryffindors with a hello and a smile.

"How was your summer, Ginny?" Dean asked.

"I practiced Quidditch a lot," I answered. I automatically left out that I had been practicing with Harry. I suddenly felt guilty for enjoying so much time with him. Without faltering, I continued, "I am definitely going to try out for the team this year."

Dean's hand slid gently into mine. "I was thinking I'd try out, too," he said.

"Oh?" I said. "I've never seen you fly."

Seamus interrupted. "That's because the idiot couldn't fly before the summer." He prodded his friend in the ribs jokingly and then pointed to himself. "I had to teach this bloke all I knew."

"So that was one hour of summer break taken care of," I said in a humorous manner, hoping that Seamus would catch on that I was only joking. I didn't have too much experience with Seamus and I hoped he would be cool with me. Lavender and Parvati shared a giggle at my jab and Seamus smiled.

"I got pretty good," Dean said. "And I heard Harry is captain this year. Think that might improve my chances?"

"Harry isn't like that," Lavender said. "He'll choose fairly." She looked at Parvati and then to me. "Do you think your brother will try out again?" She immediately turned a light shade of pink and Parvati broke out into giggles again.

"Er," I said, slightly confused as to why she was blushing and her friend was giggling. "He's planning on it, I think..." More giggles and nudges. "...I don't know if Harry will choose him though..."

Parvati nudged Lavender harder and muttered rather conspicuously, "I bet you'd choose him, Lavender."

Lavender glared at Parvati and whispered, "Shut up."

"Ask her then," she retorted.

"Ask me what?" I questioned, growing more and more annoyed by these giggling girls. I had never been good with dealing with their kind for long periods of time. It was the whole growing-up-with-brothers thing.

Lavender blushed again and refused to speak. Parvati rolled her eyes and said, "Fine. I will if you're too embarrassed." She took a deep breath and I waited for the coming question. "You spend a lot of time with Hermione, right?"

Oh no. I see where this was going. "That's obvious, Parvati. What's your point?" I asked.

“Does she fancy your brother?”

I was not sure how to answer that question. I knew she did, of course, but I didn't think Hermione really wanted the information spread around the school. Not that half of the Hogwarts population didn't already think they were an item.

“She's expressed some interest,” I said, thinking that was a safe statement.

“But they aren't a couple?” Lavender said quickly.

I slowly shook my head, resulting in another giggling fit from the girls. I rolled my eyes, thinking that Hermione might want to know about this. Perhaps it would inspire her to finally make a move.

Seamus reached over Dean's body and tapped my leg. Turning my attention towards him, he began, “I've wanted to ask...” but before he could finish, the door slid open and our attention turned towards the entrance.

Standing there in the open compartment door was Zacharias Smith. The room shifted uncomfortably. Despite the fact that all of us were members with Smith in the DA, not one of us was very fond of him. In my opinion, he was a stain upon the Hufflepuff legacy.

Not to mention that he seemed to have a mild obsession with me. You remember back in our third year when he tried to win me as Summerby's date so he could dance with only me at the Yule Ball? The thought of him fancying me almost made me lose the little breakfast I had that morning.

My suspicions were once again confirmed when his eyes shifted towards Dean and me and then to our entwined hands. He frowned and then proceeded to say, “I'm hurt, Ginny. After you dumped Michael, I thought you'd look for me.”

Dean started to say something but I quieted him. Turning back to the foul Hufflepuff, I replied, “You're not my type, Smith. I prefer my men to not be complete prats.”

“Then you settle for only partial prats?”

If it had been anyone else, I would have had to admit that it was a decent comeback, but it was Smith and I wasn't about to inflate his already large ego. Instead, I said, “Why are you here, Smith?”

Zacharias snorted in laughter. “You get to the point fast,” he said. He leaned egotistically against the frame of the door and twirled his wand in his hand. “Everyone is talking about what happened at the Ministry. I thought you could clear up for me what's fact and what's fiction.”

“I don't want to talk about it,” I replied. “*Epecially* with you.”

He ignored the statement as if he had heard the *with you* part and thought that I was interested in furthering the conversation. “Is it true there was a prophecy that named Harry as the Chosen One?”

“I said I don't want to talk about it,” I repeated.

“We all know your family is close with Harry,” Zacharias said, “so is he the one that's going to kill You-Know-Who?”

I trembled in anger. How could he be so casual about something so important? How could he stand there and want me to talk about it like it was the special at lunchtime?

While I was growing in anger with his insistence, he was growing the same way with my reluctance. Bitterly, he said, “Or is he going to let us all die like he let Cedric die?”

Lavender and Parvati gasped, covering their mouths at the rudeness. Seamus and Dean rose from their seats, angrily protesting the remark from Smith's foul mouth.

I had my wand drawn as fast as I could and the hex flying towards him even faster. As my beloved bats beat him senseless, his compartment door opened and I watched Summerby grab his friend and pull him through. He and the rest of their compartment began to swat at the bats with amusing results.

Before anything could be uttered inside my compartment, a large man had replaced Zacharias. He bore a striking resemblance to a walrus and I recognized Harry's description. This must be the new DADA professor... Slughorn, I think he called him. The professor motioned me outside and closed the compartment door.

My wand was still in my hand. I had been caught and I had not even reached Hogwarts yet. I hoped he wouldn't schedule my punishment during Quidditch tryouts. That would mark the second year in a row I had missed it because of punishment. Preparing for the worst, I placed my wand away.

Slughorn studied me for a second, looking over my face and hair. Finally, he said, "You must be Arthur Weasley's daughter."

"Ginny," I said softly. "Listen, Sir, I'm sorry about the hex. In my defense, he deserved it."

Slughorn laughed. "Deserved it, did he?" he patted me on the back. "Well, then you shouldn't be sorry, should you? That was a fair piece of magic you did there."

"Thank... you...?"

"Tell me, Ginny," he said, "what is your father up to these days? Is he still in that department he loves so much?"

"He was promoted but I can't begin to tell you what his new title is. I don't have enough breath in me to say it."

Slughorn laughed again. "I can't believe they convinced him to leave his old job behind. He was always fascinated with Muggles, even when I taught him. I never quite understood it, him being a pureblood and everything."

As Harry had relayed, I was not sure how I felt about this new professor. He was a nice man but he was overwhelming. "Being pureblood isn't everything," I replied. "My best friend is Muggleborn and she's a genius."

“Muggleborn genius?” he repeated, transfixed by the words. “Would you be talking about the same Muggleborn that Harry was talking about?”

“The same,” I replied.

“Oho!” He guffawed and his belly shook viciously. “Am I right to assume you know young Mr. Potter as well?”

“He stays with my family often,” I replied.

“He did not mention he knew such a charming young lady,” he said. “You must know if the rumors are true then.”

I flinched. Was I really going to have to deal with these questions all year, just as Harry was going to? Just as Ron and Hermione would, too? I honestly didn’t want to be hexing every curious person. Instead, I changed the subject.

“It’s almost lunch, Professor,” I said. “Would you mind if I got back...”

Slughorn stopped me. “Why don’t you come to my compartment for lunch?” he asked. “I invited several students and it would make my day if you came. What do you say?”

Once again, I was unaware how to take this new teacher. I couldn’t be sure if he would be offended if I said no. I couldn’t even be sure if this was a request and I was allowed to say no. With much hesitation, I agreed.

He led the way towards his compartment. His body took up most of the corridor so I strolled behind him and listened to him drone on about who was going to be at the lunch.

It was obvious from the get-go what this little lunch was for. Every single one of the students that were packed into the compartment, excluding me, had a family member of great influence in the past or present or, like Harry, had already done so many extraordinary things. Slughorn spent most of the time acquainting himself with each of these students.

When it came to Harry, it was clear that Slughorn viewed him more as a trophy for his little club than anything else. We spent an uncomfortable few minutes listening to Slughorn praise Harry and talk about the rumors. Harry looked like he wanted to crawl under a rock and die. He simply sat there, not saying anything.

Neville bailed him out. "We never heard a prophecy," he said, which was the truth. It might have been accurate that there was a real prophecy but it had smashed before he heard it.

I spoke up this time and came up with a pretty good lie. "That's right," I said. "Neville and I were both there, too, and all this 'Chosen One' rubbish is just the *Prophet* making things up as usual." I prided myself there in keeping my cool and not faltering in my voice. I looked at Harry who was relieved that we had covered for him.

Finally, the end of the "lunch" had come and Slughorn let us leave. Following Zabini back towards the student section, I informed Harry about how I came to be part of the festivities. He started to say something but broke off, pulled on his Invisibility Cloak, muttered a farewell, and was gone.

"What is he doing?" Neville asked me.

I shrugged. "Who knows?" I muttered, also trying to figure it out. "There is no rest for people like him."

"You reckon the *Prophet's* right about him?" Neville asked quietly as he passed into the student compartments. "Do you think he is the Chosen One?"

I didn't like to lie to Neville but if Harry hadn't told him, it wasn't my place to say. "I don't like thinking about it," I said softly.

Neville nodded. "If Harry is the Chosen One, he won't be alone. I'll help him."

"I know you will, Neville," I said, patting him on the shoulder. When we arrived at my compartment, I hugged Neville before returning back inside. He continued down the corridor.

Lavender and Parvati had already changed into their robes and the boys were in the process. Everyone looked surprised to see me still in one piece.

"We didn't think he would let you back," Seamus said.

"I didn't get in trouble," I replied, explaining the situation.

"Instead of detention, you get lunch?" Dean asked amused. He put an arm around me and looked around the compartment. "That's my girl!" He kissed me on the cheek and grinned.

When the train reached Hogsmeade station, we unloaded quickly. Stepping off the vehicle, I noticed Tonks standing off to the side, intently watching the students unloading. Since her usual vibrant hair was now a simple brown color, I almost didn't recognize her.

I told Dean that I would meet him in the Great Hall and I strolled over to visit my older friend and mentor. As I came closer, I noticed how miserable she looked as she scanned the crowd. She didn't even notice me until I stopped and greeted her.

"Wotcher, Ginny," she said, glancing at me and back to the crowd. Her face was stony hard and showed little emotion except a deep sadness inside of her.

I wondered if she missed Sirius? Did she think she could have done something to stop his death. "What are you doing, Tonks?" I asked finally.

"Watching for Harry," she replied. "I saw your brother and Hermione exit but he wasn't with them. Do you think he had his Cloak on?"

"He had it on earlier," I replied, "but do you think he needs it out here?"

Tonks didn't answer. I stood with her in awkward silence watching the students pile out. As the crowd dispersed, she pointed to a window where the blinds were down. "I'm going to check it out."

"Do you want some help?" I asked.

“No,” she said. “You better keep moving.” Without another word, she left my company and walked onto the train, followed closely by her newfound personality.

Before I turned to leave, I stole another look at the compartment. It was where the Slytherins usually sat. I turned my attention back to Hogwarts and jogged towards the carriages, but the last one had already rolled away. I sprinted as fast as I could towards the castle entrance, slipping in just as the gates were closing, and watched the last two students enter the castle. When I reached the doors, I was out of breath. Leaning against the wall, I stopped to regain my composure.

“Been up to something, Weasley?” a cold voice said. Looking up, Snape was standing at the door. “The First Years have already crossed the lake and are about to begin the Sorting. What was so important that you are so far behind your peers?”

“I was talking to Tonks.”

“Your friendship with Nymphadora does not give you free reign when it comes to school rules,” Snape sneered.

“I don’t...”

“Since you feel so privileged, maybe you could tell me how many points I should take away for your tardiness? Five points per minute, would you say? That would put you up to fifty points.”

I cringed. If I agreed or disagreed, I was reinforcing his accusation that I was feeling privileged. Instead of humoring him, I took the silent approach.

Luckily, we were interrupted. Snape glared at the silver wolf that was running towards us. He pointed his wand at it and the wolf stopped and spoke the message in Tonks’s dull tone, “I have Harry. Come to the gates and let him in.”

Snape’s sneer was even bigger. If there was anyone he enjoyed taunting more than a Weasley, it was Harry. As the Patronus faded, he completely ignored me and set off towards the gates.

Hurrying quickly through the school, I slipped into the Great Hall relatively unnoticed. The Sorting had just begun and I found my empty seat next to Dean. I looked up to the stool and saw a young girl being Sorted into Ravenclaw.

"What happened?" Dean whispered to me.

"Snape stopped me," I replied. "We had a nice chat."

"Did you lose us points already?" Seamus interjected in.

"No, he got distracted," I replied.

Hermione was several seats away and she motioned for my attention. Next to her was an empty place and she whispered to me, "Where's Harry?"

"With Tonks," I whispered back.

"Is he okay?" Ron asked.

I shrugged.

When the Sorting ended, the eating began. Munching through chicken legs and chips, Dean was asking me if I could give him a couple Quidditch pointers before the tryouts. Eventually he started talking about some Muggle sport called football that he and his stepfather watched all summer.

The doors banged open and Harry had entered. From the distance, it looked like something had covered his face and it looked like... it was.... Harry's face was covered in dry blood. When he sat down, Hermione cleaned him off and I tried to listen intently to the story he was about to tell but he hushed Ron and Hermione's questions.

Any hope that this year would be quiet was immediately dashed.

Chapter Eleven: Translating the Heart

“He’s looking at me again, isn’t he, Arnold?”

I sat in the busy Common Room one night after dinner, playing with my Pygmy Puff on the carpet. Dean had already gone up to his dorm room to finish some homework and I had been listening to Harry, Ron, and Hermione talk about Draco and his supposed plan. After several minutes of arguing, the Trio had grown quiet. That’s when I had the strange sensation that I was being watched.

Arnold cooed softly, his eyes staring up at me innocently. He hopped from my hands to the floor and nuzzled my leg. I placed a hand on the creature and rubbed it affectionately.

That wasn’t the first time that I had suspected Harry looking at me. There were several times in the past three weeks where I thought he had been staring in my general direction, but I had ignored them for the most part. And I wasn’t about to turn around at that moment just to check.

“Someone sent it to him by owl, then,” Harry finally said, breaking the silence and his looks towards me.

After both Ron and Harry retreated to their dorm, Hermione called for me. Holding Arnold in my hands, I stood up and sat beside my friend at the table. “What’s up?”

“I’m sure you heard most of that, am I right?” Hermione asked.

I nodded. “I can’t think of any explanation either.”

“That’s because there is none,” Hermione replied, “except that Malfoy isn’t doing anything. I wish Harry would drop it.”

I watched Lavender and Parvati stand from their table and make their way into the girls’ dormitories, each giggling excitedly as they passed the boys’ dorms. Remembering what they had said to me on the train, I retold the tale to Hermione.

"Like I haven't noticed," Hermione scoffed, scowling at the most recent news. "She hasn't exactly been discreet about, has she? *Hi, Ron! Good luck, Ron!*" She even made an attempt to sound like Lavender's giggles. "Thinks she's so special when it was me who helped Ron..." she trailed off.

"Helped Ron what?" I asked curiously, watching her face turn bright pink. "Hermione, you *did* hex Cormac at the Quidditch tryouts?"

"Well..." she started, embarrassed.

"I thought you might have!" I replied, perplexed. This was Hermione we were talking about, who hated breaking rules and cheating. I suppose that when it came to Ron, Hermione was always willing to bend a little on her morals.

"I'm sorry..."

"Sorry?" I repeated. "Don't be! I don't want an idiot like McLaggen on the team. Thank you is more like it!"

Hermione, looking for a way to stop talking about her guilt, changed the subject to me and Dean and asked how we were doing.

I explained to her that we were decent, but it wasn't exactly what I had been expecting. We weren't treating each other the same as we did when we were friends and that was what had attracted me to him so much. In fact, I had been downright uncomfortable around him for the last week or so.

She advised me to stick with it and not give up so easily if it was something I thought had potential. When that subject wore off, she began complaining about that stupid potions book Harry had been using. I defended Harry since the book had appeared innocent enough.

When the crowd dispersed in the Common Room and Arnold was sound asleep in my arms, I said goodnight to Hermione and called it a night.

Halfway through October and before our first Hogsmeade trip, I was leaving the DADA classroom to pick up a book I had forgotten. Hoping to put breakfast behind me fast so I could work on some last-minute homework, I turned towards the direction of the Great Hall and walked past the stone gargoyle that was the entrance to Dumbledore's office.

As I passed, the stairwell descended and Dumbledore himself stepped out and greeted me with a smile. "Miss Weasley!" he said, his voice sounding much like the grandfatherly figure he was. "It has been too long since we've spoken! First off, congratulations are in order for your position as Chaser. Dare I say you may even start to rival Charlie's talents?"

I grinned and shook my head. "That's not happening anytime soon, Professor."

His half-moon spectacles gleamed upon his crooked nose. "And how is the team coming along this term?"

I thought about Ron and his lack of confidence. Most practices had been failures so far and I cringed to think what we'd look like come our first game. "We're, uh, showing potential."

"Of course, as a teacher, I am not supposed to show favoritism towards any particular house team," he said, his blue eyes twinkling. "But I'm sure you won't say a word that I'll be rooting for Gryffindor."

"Your secret's safe with me," I replied.

I began to wonder why Dumbledore had stopped me in the middle of the corridor. It's not that I disliked speaking to the headmaster; it was just that he usually had a reason for everything he did apart from friendly conversation.

Answering my question, he reached into his pocket and exhumed a small piece parchment from within. "Ginny, would you be so kind and deliver this to Harry?" He held the note to me in his long outstretched fingers.

I took the paper from him and assumed it concerned the time for their next meeting. Curiosity took the better of me and I looked at the man with the long, silvery hair. "Professor, may I ask what you're teaching Harry?"

"Oh," Dumbledore said. "A little of this, a little of that."

"Does it have to do with the prophecy?"

Looking extremely amused, he said, "I was under the impression that the prophecy had been smashed and no one heard it, but it would be foolish of me to think that you would believe such a half-truth."

Did that mean yes? I wondered. So many things ran through my mind and I wanted to ask them all. Rolling the parchment into a scroll, I placed the note inside my robe pockets. "Do you remember when I asked you about the diary, Sir?"

"Vividly."

"Have you figured out how V-Voldemort was able to come back through it?" I asked, and continued, "How he came back to life?"

"I believe I am far closer to solving that puzzle," Dumbledore replied.

"Can you tell me?"

Dumbledore breathed in heavily and looked extremely conflicted, considering if the information was something I should be aware of. "Forgive me, Miss Weasley," he said softly. "In time, you will understand why I cannot pass this to you."

I was honestly hurt. It was me whom Tom Riddle had possessed. It was me whom he had wanted to use to come back to power. Why was I supposed to be left in the dark? "Professor," I said, my eyes not meeting his, "don't you allow Ron and Hermione to know?" When he nodded slowly, I went on. "I can help Harry, too."

"And you will," Dumbledore said, his distant eyes becoming slightly more amused than a second before. "When the time comes, you will assist Harry in a way Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger cannot."

My eyes darted up from the floor and stared into his all-knowing pupils. I wondered if he could see the change in Harry's behavior towards me and was interpreting it differently than I was. "Professor, what does that mean?"

"My dear," Dumbledore replied, "one does not need to read minds to translate the heart." He smiled, letting me comprehend what he said. "If you will excuse me, Professor Slughorn has invited me to his office to sample some breakfast." He patted me on the shoulder and passed beside me.

I stood there for several seconds, watching Dumbledore's purple robes flutter from the wind of an open window, before departing for the Great Hall. He was a strange man, I decided, and so cryptic. What did his latest words mean? Had he viewed Harry's mind and discovered something that I was missing?

Contemplating the conversation, I arrived in the Great Hall and located the Golden Trio. I pulled the parchment from my pocket and handed it to him. "Hey, Harry, I'm supposed to give you this."

He looked delighted to see me. "Thanks, Ginny!" he said, unrolling the note and scanning the note quickly. "It's Dumbledore's next lesson. Monday evening!" He began to smile even wider. "Want to join us in Hogsmeade, Ginny?"

What? Join you? As in all three of you? How long had I been trying to join the Golden Trio? How long had they been leaving me behind more often than not? And when I finally come to terms with it and find others to join, now I'm invited?

Annoyed with my unfortunate luck, I said, "I'm going with Dean- might see you there." I waved to them as I departed but not before I saw how disappointed Harry looked. If I didn't know any better, he had been looking forward to the trip so we could go *together...*

Don't, I thought. Harry doesn't fancy you.

Soon after breakfast, Dean and I walked hand in hand towards Hogsmeade. I was nervous about our date that he wanted to badly to

go on, not because I didn't want to go, but because I was frightened that he would try to kiss me.

We had been dating for three months and I still had not kissed him. *Okay*, we had kissed but we hadn't *kissed*, if you understand what I mean. I would peck him sweetly on the cheek and on the lips, but the action had not been more than a few seconds. It felt awkward to do otherwise.

And this was *me* and I loved kissing.

The weather was miserable that day. It had snowed earlier that morning and a white powder dusted the ground. They said that it was calling for sleet, too. Bundled up in our warmest clothing, I looked at Dean.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Madam Puddifoot's," he replied.

Great, I thought sarcastically. *We're going to the most romantic place in Hogsmeade. He's going to expect me to kiss him, and kiss him, and kiss him again. I can't handle that kind of pressure. Maybe all he wants is one of her famous ice cream sundaes. Yeah, that was probably it.*

Trying to take my mind off future events, I said, "Do you think we'll have time to meet up with Ron and them later?"

"I don't know," Dean replied. "We'll see."

"And I want to send a letter to Mum first." Had I really just said that? I needed to do no such thing. I was merely trying to put off the romantic setting. *You're a coward, Ginny*, I said to myself.

Dean had not been himself lately. We were usually able to joke around and have fun with each other, but it had been an odd couple weeks. It had started shortly after Quidditch tryouts. I had been chosen and he might have been feeling left out, beaten by his own girlfriend. Then there was the fact that he had not tried to snog me. Most blokes would at least make a move.

We said very little to each other on the way to the Post Office. When we arrived, I searched through my pockets and claimed to have left the letter back in my room. I thought about going back and getting it, but Dean was getting anxious.

When we passed by Honeydukes on the way back, I glanced inside the window and saw Slughorn talking to Harry. I grinned, thinking that Harry had just weaseled himself out of yet *another* one of the Potions Master's dinners. Then I frowned, thinking that I was forced to attend this Monday.

"Are you okay?" Dean asked, squeezing my hand.

"What?" I asked. "Oh. I was thinking how I'll be going to my second Slughorn dinner since term started. Harry's meeting with Dumbledore so he can't schedule practice during it."

"I heard Slughorn's not so bad," Dean said. "I kind of wish I was in that class. Do you know what he showed them the first day?"

"No," I replied, not really paying attention. We passed by Zonko's Joke shop and it saddened me that the owners had abandoned it. Staring at the boarded up windows, I heard Dean talking again.

"...I think Hermione smelled Ron's scent," Dean replied. He must be talking about the love potion Slughorn had showed the Sixth Years. Hermione had, in fact, smelled the woody aroma of the burrow that the Weasley men wore like a natural fragrance. "Can you guess what I'd smell?" he asked.

We had come to the fork in the road that led either back to the castle or to Madam Puddifoot's. I shuddered from the October air and pulled my coat around me tighter. I stopped abruptly and looked at Dean, who was waiting for me to add my part to the conversation.

"Ginny, we don't have to do this if you don't want to."

I frowned. "No... I do..." But I had swallowed nervously.

Dean shook his head and let go of my hand. "Why has this been so weird, Ginny?"

So he had noticed. I blinked several times before answering, trying to figure out the best way to approach it. "I don't know, Dean."

"Do you like me?"

"Of course I do!" I replied. "It's just..."

"Weird."

"Yeah," I agreed. "I thought we would be good together, you know?"

"We always had a good laugh," Dean said. "We were really good friends."

"Exactly!" I replied.

"We've known each other for years and only been dating three months. Of course, it's going to take some time to adjust," Dean said.

That made sense. I threw that around my head for a few moments. Of course that's what it was. We just needed to take some time to adjust to the relationship. I smiled at him sweetly and locked my gloved hands in his.

He was silent for a couple seconds. The sleet was beginning to fall now. Ice started to attach to his hat. His solemn face slowly crept into an evil grin and he quickly bent down to the ground. He scooped up a ball of slushy snow and said, "Ginny, if you knew any better, you'd run."

"You wicked boy!" I hissed. I sprinted away from him as he threw the slushball at me. I laughed successfully as the frigid weapon missed me. I turned, watched Dean bend down to pack another ball, and I raced towards him at full speed.

"Ooompfth!" he grunted as I knocked him down. He hit the ground and slid a few feet from his place.

"Haha!" I cried. "Victorious!"

Dean stood up, brushed himself off, and looked angry. My triumphant cheers were cut short and I looked at him in annoyance. I told him to suck it up, but the boy had fooled me. Instead of anger, his grin broke out in amusement and he chased me down.

When it became too cold to fight in the weather anymore, we held each other, and Dean rubbed my back to warm me up. I finally felt like I belonged in his arms. Looking up into his dark eyes, I started to lean closer towards his face, closing my eyelids slowly. Centimeters apart....

“You’re being stupid, Katie!”

Interrupted, I turned to see who had spoken. It was Leanne, a Seventh Year, and she was walking beside Katie Bell. Katie, another Quidditch team member of mine, held a package in her hands.

“You don’t understand,” Katie said, but it didn’t sound like her. She sounded far away, like her real self was miles from Hogsmeade.

“You can’t take that up to the castle!” Leanne yelled louder this time.

Dean whispered to me, his breath making little clouds of mist in front of me. “Let’s get inside before they get to Filch. Race you on the count of three.”

“GO!” I shouted before he had a chance to count. Parting from Dean quickly, I left the arguing girls and my pursuing boyfriend in my wake. Laughing as hard as I could, I never expected the scene we were leaving to be a disaster, an Imperius conspiracy to murder Albus Dumbledore.

Katie had been seriously injured. If she had touched the necklace with any more of her skin, she would have died. She was sent to St. Mungo’s and we were one Chaser short of a full Quidditch team.

Of course, Harry suspected Malfoy was behind the attack, but according to Hermione’s tale, the Slytherin had been in detention with Professor McGonagall. If I knew Harry, he wasn’t going to let that little detail annul his suspicions.

Unfortunately I had delivered Harry the most recent time of his lessons with Dumbledore and it just so happened to be on the night of Slughorn's upcoming dinner. Grumbling and wishing that I had lost that paper, I considered playing the Slytherin route and run from adversity, but Hermione insisted that I'd want to come that night.

"Besides," Hermione said as we walked together towards Slughorn's office, "You owe me. I've been coming to these things alone. There's only so much Cormac a girl can take by herself." She shuddered at the thought of the large Gryffindor.

I had to stop myself from losing my lunch. If that boy ever found a permanent position on our team, I would quit. I could not play with an idiot like that. Luckily, a certain witch who shall remain nameless took those matters into her own hands and Ron became our Keeper. He may not have been the most talented, but he was certainly loads better as a team player.

"Does Cormac fancy you, Hermione?" I asked in a sing-song voice, despite knowing the answer might repulse me.

Hermione shot me a look of disgust. "I don't want to think about that," she said. "Although he wants me to be his date for the Christmas party."

"You said no, of course," I stated. When she nodded, I focused my attention on the other part of her statement. "A Christmas party?"

"I guess it was really popular when he was a full-time teacher. Any one famous enough whom Slughorn is chummy with got invited," Hermione said. "I hear Eldred Worple and Joanne Rowling are going to be there this year."

"Joanne Rowling?" I repeated. "My Mum used to read me that story she wrote... *Rabbit and Miss Bee*... but who's Edward Wimple?"

"Eldred Worple," she corrected and looked at my confused face. "Honestly, Ginny, open a book sometime. He wrote *Blood Brother: My Life Amongst the Vampires*."

"And we can bring dates?"

“Yes,” Hermione answered.

“You better get a move on if you’re going to stay ahead of Lavender. You are bringing Ron, aren’t you?”

“It’s a possibility,” she said casually. We rounded the corner and found ourselves at Slughorn’s room. We could hear the people inside already chatting. “He hasn’t set the date yet, mostly because he wants Harry there. I don’t think he’s going to wiggle out of this one.”

I giggled. Harry had been lucky enough to avoid these dinners. If I were him, I’d do the same thing. I’d hate to have people fawning over me because of a significantly hard past that made me famous.

Hermione opened the office door and ushered me in. The students of the Slug Club were gathered in the center of the room, talking to an obviously well-known personality. I looked at Hermione and she shrugged mischievously.

“Ginny!” Slughorn greeted. Rushing towards me, his bulbous belly jiggled and the ends of his moustache bounced to and fro. “Harry has not changed his mind then?” He looked from me to Hermione and we both shook our heads to his dismay. “Rather unfortunate. I had a special treat for all my Quidditch players tonight.” He motioned towards the crowd of my peers. “Miss Jones,” he said, addressing the crowd.

The crowd parted. In the center stood a woman a few centimeters taller than myself. I recognized her immediately. Her dark hair and prominent gray eyes were unmistakable. I had seen her many times in *Quidditch Illustrated*. Standing before me was the captain of the Holyhead Harpies, Gwenog Jones.

“I’d like you to meet a rather fascinating young lady,” Slughorn said, escorting her towards me. “Ginny Weasley.”

I was star struck as I shook her hand. “Hello,” I managed to say. This was *the* Gwenog Jones, the Beater of an international Quidditch team. She had led her team to third place last year and by the looks of it, they would be going all the way this year. Their team looked flawless.

“Horace has been busy talking my ear off about you and Harry Potter,” she said. “They say Harry is the best Seeker this school has seen in years.”

I nodded. “He is.”

“But they also say you’re a natural on the broom, too,” she said. She held up a pair of omnioculars. “Horace was kind enough to provide some footage.” She held the set up to her eyes and peered through them. After a few seconds, she said, “Yes, I see what they mean.”

“Thank you, Ms. Jones,” I said, not knowing really what else to say.

“Call me Gwenog,” she said, and then asked, “You have two years left of education?” When I confirmed, she went on. “You can only get better.” She dug into her pocket and pulled a card from it. She handed it to me. “When you graduate from here, make sure you look us up. We might be needing your abilities.”

I took the card and studied it. In shimmering gold letters, her name was at the top followed by her captain status, position, and address. I was dumbfounded as I turned the card over in my hand. A professional Quidditch player thought I was talented and had given me the opportunity to pursue a life I could only dream about.

“It’s unfortunate I could not meet Harry Potter tonight,” she said, smiling at my fascination with the card. “I would have liked to give him a card.”

I didn’t want to be rude and tell her that her own team was all women, something that she surely knew. She must have identified my confusion because she grinned. “I know some teams who would love to have him, although I’ll admit that I was tempted to waver the all-witch regulation.”

I grinned right back at her. All articles about the woman stated how much she loved competition. If she was willing to pass Harry off to another team, it must have been true. But there was one problem. “He’s going to be an Auror,” I said.

Gwenog nodded in understanding. “I would expect no less from him.”

Slughorn interrupted and reminded us that dinner would soon be cold. Following his direction, Gwenog and I sat next to each other, munching on steak-and-kidney pie and sipping our pumpkin juice. We swapped Quidditch stories and flying tales all night, laughing together, and enjoying the pleasant atmosphere. Near the end of the meal, we took several photographs together.

Leaving the party that night, I was eternally grateful that Hermione had forced me to come to the party. Holding the card still in my hands, I turned to her and before I could say anything, she said, "Didn't I say you'd want to come?" Without another word, I embraced my friend.

Harry took his grand old time replacing Katie. When he finally asked Dean, my boyfriend was ecstatic to be part of the team. I was happy for him as well. Seamus hadn't liked the idea that much, claiming that he had coached Dean and it wasn't fair. I thought his complaints had no grounds, seeing that Dean had been the better one at the tryouts.

The first practice with Dean went extremely well... except for Ron. I couldn't understand how my brother could be getting *worse* after all he practices we've had. When he bloodied Demelza's mouth, Harry called for practice to be over several minutes later.

After leaving the changing room, Dean and I walked hand in hand. He was talking excitedly about the upcoming game and I praised him for a job well done. I smiled. Things had been extremely pleasant with him and me since our talk at Hogsmeade. It was no longer awkward when we were together.

Taking the shortcut to Gryffindor tower, Dean stopped me in the empty corridor. Sheepishly, he pulled a piece of paper from his robes and unfolded it. "I wanted to give you this, Ginny," he said, handing me the paper.

As I unfolded the paper, I lost my breath. It was a portrait of me, full of detail. I felt as if I was looking into a mirror. He had gotten the exact color of my hair and even the strand that always came loose upon my cheek. He had remembered every one of my most prominent freckles. "This is amazing," I whispered, asking if he used magic to accomplish the intricate little details.

"No," he replied.

"Where did you learn to do this?"

"Art class in primary school," he replied. "Although I've always had the knack for it, even before Mum sent me to Muggle school."

And at that moment, looking at the remarkable portrait of myself, knowing that it must have taken hours to create, knowing that he must know my face so well to include even the smallest details, I wanted to kiss him. Folding the sketch as quickly as I could and placing it into my pocket, I pinned him against the wall and did just that.

And I didn't think that I was kissing my friend. I didn't think that it was odd. There, in the silent corridor, nothing else mattered. He was my boyfriend and I was his girlfriend and I wanted to kiss him... I wanted...

"Oi!"

Minutes later, I slammed the secret entrance to the passageway shut as hard as I possibly could. I wiped tears of anger and hurt from my eyes, refusing to give into such feelings that I could not begin to understand. Being caught snogging my boyfriend by my brother and Harry was not on the list of things I had hoped to accomplish before my life ended.

Ron's words had been no different than what he usually would say, but this moment was different. He had interrupted an intimate scene and I was furious for several reasons. One, he had no right to tell me who I could or could not fancy, date, kiss, snog, even shag if I so desired. Two, he was too chicken to pluck up the courage and ask Hermione out and here he was, angry that I was *happy*.

I took the stairwell towards the portrait hole, stomping hard on the stone steps as I recounted the things I had said to Ron. Seething, I realized I had crossed a line that I wasn't planning to cross. If I had been in a calmer state of mind, I might have been able to make Ron understand my point, but I was furious and my words could not be controlled.

And Ron constantly trying to jinx me didn't help soothe my rage either. He was fortunate I didn't have a clear shot at him. He might have missed me but I was not about to do the same. And he should consider himself lucky that Harry had forced him against the wall...

...Harry...

And there was the third reason why I was so upset. I had never wanted Harry to see me kissing Dean or anybody for that manner, but that is not what was affecting me the most when it came to third cause of my fury.

When Dean and I separated from our kiss, Harry had the most curious look on his face. While Ron chastised me for my supposed indecent behavior, Dean had tried to appeal to Harry, giving him a semi-macho kid-caught-with-his-hand-in-the-cookie-jar grin. Harry did not return it and Dean chose to leave.

The look never left his face while Ron and I argued. Harry did not say a word until Ron was about to insult me, and Harry defended me. Harry did not move until Ron pulled his wand on me, and he stepped between my brother and me. Harry did not act until Ron had nearly hit me with an orange spell, and he pushed Ron so forcibly against the wall that I could have sworn that it was someone else.

I came to the Fat Lady's painting and she sat there, snoozing. I muttered the password to her but she didn't stir. Using her hesitation, I thought about that look that Harry had given me again. I couldn't take it, the look that I couldn't recognize, the look that I had never seen from his face towards me before, the look that I swore could only mean jealousy...

Shut up, Ginny... he's not jealous... never has been, never will be....

"PIXIE DUST!" I screamed at the Fat Lady and she almost jumped out of her frame. She looked as if she was about to comment, but upon seeing my furious face, she murmured something and the portrait swung open.

Storming into the Common Room, Dean was waiting for me. I tried to say goodnight to him quickly, but he took my hand and tried to calm

me. I didn't want to be rude so I squeezed his hand and said goodnight again. I turned towards my dorm with my back to him, and he said something that stopped me dead in my tracks.

"Did you see that look Harry was giving me?" Dean asked. "Do you think he fancies you?"

Without turning around, I forced myself to laugh and tried to ignore the sensation his words gave me. "Not a chance, Dean," I replied. "He sees me like his sister. If you're worried, I expect they'll be back soon."

Without another word, I climbed the stairs. Opening my door forcibly, I wasted no time in ripping my Quidditch robes off and throwing them in the corner. I rummaged through my drawers and found my pyjamas, all the while running the events through my troubled mind.

Harry fancies me

No, he doesn't.

But that look he was giving you

Was a look like a brother would give

But Ron didn't look at you like that

Yeah, but Ron is a prat

Excellent point

I couldn't allow myself to think like that. Ever since I met Harry at King's Cross, I had been hoping foolishly, waiting irrationally for him to notice me, and wasting too much precious time overanalyzing every little look and every little word and every little damn action from him. I was done with it.

Later in bed, as I stared up at the ceiling, I decided that the look, the oh-so-curious look, was nothing more than Harry looking at someone he thought of as a younger sister he wanted to protect. Simple as that. Nothing more, nothing less.

But as I drifted through dreams, I told a different story. I saw myself back in that shortcut again, but not with Dean, with Harry. Harry, not Dean, was kissing me and that was something brothers did not do. It was easy to betray my conscious thoughts, but doing the same with dreams was impossible.

The next few days concerning Ron were horrible. Every time he passed me, he stared straight ahead and refused to look at me. I hadn't thought it possible for Ron to again be getting worse, but he practiced horribly, even reducing Demelza to tears. I swear he was about to punch Harry in the face.

I expected Ron to react to my words. I was prepared for his anger towards me, which never lasted more than a handful of days, but I had not expected Hermione to receive the worst of Ron's anger. Ron hadn't been motivated at all towards Hermione.

When Hermione, close to tears, sought me out the night before our first Quidditch game, I was hesitant to explain to her why Ron was acting radically different. When I finally told her and explained that I had revealed her kissing habits with Krum, she was quiet and did not speak for several minutes.

"Did you have to tell him about Viktor?" Hermione whispered, wiping her nose with a tissue. "It was over a year ago. It doesn't mean anything anymore."

"I wasn't thinking clearly. I'm sorry," I said. I felt so horrible, thinking how far I might have pushed Hermione back.

"Why does he have to be so angry with me?" Hermione asked, addressing no one more than she was addressing me. She shook her head and stood to leave. When I asked her where she was going, she said, "I need to be alone." She exited my room, barely looking at me. I couldn't blame her for being unhappy with me. I would have been unhappy with me.

But Hermione would forget all about her anger towards me the following night.

Ron entered the Common Room looking irritated. As he closed the portrait hole, the Gryffindors cheered for him and I even met him to give a congratulatory slap on the back. He was desperately trying to hide his pleasure of being the center of attention. Grasping my brother's hand, I said to him, "I might still be mad at you, but that was some excellent playing."

Before Ron could say anything, Lavender came up beside me and giggled fiercely. She leaned towards Ron and whispered something into his ear and after several seconds, Ron's grin was wider than Cormac's body. He looked at me with sneering eyes as he nodded towards Lavender. She grasped his hand and led him away from me. They sat down on the closest chair and began to kiss fiercely.

The Common Room was deathly quiet for all of five seconds as they watched the awkward scene before them. When Harry entered, the mob was once again active and overtook the Captain with shouts of jubilation. I stood off to the side, waiting to talk to Harry one more time before I called it a night.

I glanced at my brother and his kissing partner and felt sick to my stomach. When Harry broke free of everyone, I spoke to him briefly and walked off, leaving him to ponder the actions of his best friend. Turning from him, I saw her.

Hermione, wedged between Cormac and Romilda, was staring at Ron and Lavender. Her face told such a story of woe. Her mouth was slightly open, moving as if she wanted to start talking, and her bottom lip began to quiver. Her eyes glistened as the candlelight flickered off her pupils, and I couldn't understand how the tears hadn't fallen yet. I was about to confront her when a hand pulled me away.

"Good game, Ginny," Dean said, kissing me on the lips, and allowing me a moment of distraction. I turned from him quickly but Hermione was gone. Although I didn't know where, I saw Harry exiting the portrait hole and I guessed that he might have been following her.

"My brother is the biggest prat I've ever known," I muttered, looking back to my boyfriend.

He shrugged. "It's not like Hermione and him were dating, was it?"

I didn't want to say anything. Two of the most important people in my life were not on friendly terms with me right now and I didn't need a third to be frustrated with. I managed the best possible smile I could, told Dean I was going to sleep, and left the Common Room, kissing eels and all.

Hermione quickly found me the following day. When I saw her coming towards me, I expected to start talking about Ron straightaway. Instead, she hugged me, apologized for being so cold towards me, and started talking about the upcoming Christmas party. I barely listened, trying to understand her. She was acting as if nothing was wrong and doing a good job at it.

The following weeks did not improve the situation at all. Ron and Lavender were joined at the lips any chance they got. Anyone around Ron looked utterly uncomfortable. For once, I bet Harry was glad to be in class so the lovers couldn't reach each other. I was secretly glad the twins hadn't invented Extendable Lips instead of ears.

Hermione avoided them at all costs which was easy to do when they were together. I'm not quite sure how she managed to live with Lavender in the same sleeping quarters. I imagined her trying to sleep while Lavender and Parvati giggled about Ron, all the while trying to pull the pillow over her ears. Perhaps she might have used the Imperturbable charm.

"Will you give it up, Ginny?" Hermione whispered to me in the library. I had been vainly attempting to convince her to speak to Ron. "I am not going to talk to him when I did nothing to deserve this treatment except kiss Viktor Krum."

I distracted myself by looking towards the table. "I'm really sorry," I said, trying to make up for my blunder weeks ago. I might have just ruined any chance of seeing Hermione as my sister-in-law and I felt horrible.

"We've been over this before!" she hissed, turning the pages of her Charms textbook as I heard Peeves humming a Christmas tune in the hallway. "You couldn't have known how Ron was going to react. I don't blame you for anything. Ron is perfectly capable of being a git all on his own."

I nodded, but couldn't shake the feeling of responsibility. I wanted to say more on the subject but Hermione once again shushed me and changed the topic.

"Besides," she said, "we need to worry about Harry right now."

My heart fluttered. When I told her of Ron and Harry catching me in the shortcut with Dean, I had left out the details of Harry's look. I figured they had no relevance to the situation at hand, and I didn't want to bother Hermione with Harry's new big brotherly actions towards me. I was pleased to hear she had noticed without me saying anything.

"I heard a couple girls in the bathroom talking about slipping him a love potion," Hermione replied, dashing my theory that she had noticed Harry's attitude towards me. "The party's tomorrow. He's going to have big problems if he doesn't ask someone to it soon."

I imagined myself for a second accepting Harry's invitation to the party and walking hand in hand into Slughorn's office. I shook that image out of my head and gathered my things, making up an excuse that I needed to meet with Dean.

Coming to the exit quickly, I turned the corner and slammed straight into Draco Malfoy. My books went flying in every direction as the blond Slytherin gave a raucous chuckle. I bent down to pick my things up and looked up at him. He looked as if he had not slept very well in weeks.

"Watch where you're going, Weasley," he sneered, stepping on one of my textbooks towards the library entrance. He said nothing else as he slipped into the room.

I mumbled some choice words in his general direction and stared towards the library, pondering all the ways that I could hex him the next time we crossed paths. I turned back to my task and found myself looking into the most amazing set of emerald eyes I had ever seen.

Harry was crouched down to my level, holding my Potions book in front of him towards me. He grinned at me sheepishly. "Everything okay, Ginny?"

I nodded and everything seemed to melt away from me as I lost myself in his stare. "I just dropped my stuff," I whispered, forgetting about any rude sons of Death Eaters that had crossed my path.

Handing me the last book from the ground, we both stood up. "I've been looking for Hermione. Is she in there?" he asked.

"Where else would she be?" I asked, and he laughed. I added, "Got tired at being a spectator with Ron?"

He nodded. "I wish they would just be friends again."

"You know how stubborn they are," I replied. "Look how long they've fancied each other." I knew I was treading in dangerous waters, revealing the little bit of Hermione's personal feelings, but I didn't think it was too much of a secret anymore. Harry had either talked to Ron about it or noticed the same thing because he agreed.

"So, are you taking Dean to the party?" Harry asked. I thought I saw a spark behind his eyes when he said Dean's name, but I must have imagined it.

I nodded, almost hating letting him know such a thing. I pointed towards him and said, "There's a line of girls waiting to be asked by the famous Harry Potter. You've only got a day left to invite somebody. Which one has caught your eye?"

Harry looked like he was about to be sick. I began to ask him if he was alright but Peeves interrupted, laughing and whooping. "Weezy and Potty!" he shouted, pointing above our heads towards the ceiling. "Better not break Christmas traditions!"

We both looked up and saw the mistletoe that had not been there seconds before. Peeves had obviously placed it there while we were distracted. I laughed nervously as I glanced back towards Harry, who looked as if he was about to be sick once again.

While Peeves danced around us, I nervously held the books in my hands, expecting to once again drop them in anticipation. Of course I knew that he wasn't about to kiss me beneath the mistletoe and for many reasons, the first and foremost being that he had no desire to kiss someone who was like his little sister, but I couldn't help but think of...

"Dean!" I nearly shouted, seeing my boyfriend wandering at the other end of the hallway. Patting Harry on the shoulder, I nearly ran to Dean. I turned a light shade of pink as if I had been caught. I had no reason to feel guilty. I hadn't planned the rendezvous beneath the mistletoe.

"Was that mistletoe?" Dean asked, looking towards the entrance of the library. I glanced back and no longer saw Harry, but Peeves grabbed the decoration and floated off in the opposite direction.

Stumbling over my words, I tried to explain the situation to him. Dean simply smiled as he understood what was going on. At the end of my story, Dean said, "I'm not mad at you. It was Peeves," he said, trying to calm my worrisome looks. "I don't think you're right, Ginny. Harry never stops looking at you anymore. Do me a favor, and just keep an eye on him. I don't know if I trust him."

After Dean's enlightening comments to me, I thought back on Harry's behavior over the last few weeks, and began to study it even more than usual. It was definitely suspicious. For example, every time I found Harry staring in my direction, he would pretend he wasn't looking at me, and he continuously tried to steal moments of physical contact, but would immediately pull away as if he had committed some kind of mortal sin.

One of the most significant pieces of evidence that Harry was beginning to fancy me was his invitation of Luna to Slughorn's Christmas party. With no offense at all to Luna because she is an absolute lovely person, she is not the type of girl most blokes would extend their hand romantically to. Harry going with Luna to the party was equivalent to Harry taking his sister (if he had one). She was a safe option.

Which meant that Harry was unable to ask whom he really wanted to ask. I kept studying him thoroughly to discover if any girls were causing him that nervous look he used to get when he looked at Cho, but he wasn't looking at anyone... *okay... scratch that...* he was looking at *me*.

With all these things running through my head, I needed to talk to Hermione. She was not one to guide me in the wrong direction and it would be an excellent chance to distract her from her recent altercations with my brother. Instead, she hit me with the news that she had accepted Cormac's Christmas invitation.

"*You what?*" I said annoyed, completely forgetting about Harry for the moment. "Hermione, you're just doing this to make Ron jealous."

"Oh, I am not." And she giggled, not like a Hermione giggle, but an *I'm-a-school-girl-trying-to-seek-revenge-on-the-boy-I-fancy* giggle. "Besides, you're not one to speak. You've been trying to make Harry jealous for over a year."

"*Excuse me?*" I said in disbelief. "I happen to care a lot for Dean. You can't possibly say the same about Cormac?"

"Of course I can," she said in an unconvincing way "He's strong... and he's really good at Quidditch..."

"You don't care about Quidditch!" I shrieked. "You care about Ron! Honestly, Hermione, how can you be the best at everything in school, but be as daft as he is when it comes to matters of the heart?"

Later that night, Dean and I were drinking punch in a nice secluded table off in the corner of Slughorn's party. As he chatted about his plans for break, I amused myself by catching glimpses of Harry dragging Luna away from uncomfortable situations.

"She actually went through with it," Dean said, pointing to the rather awkward couple of Hermione and Cormac. She looked terrified to be even near him. "Do you think she really fancies the bloke?" he asked me.

I scoffed and shook my head negatively. As I watched the two, Cormac eagerly pointed upwards towards the mistletoe. Before Hermione could react, he had planted his lips against hers. I held my hand to my mouth in a mixture of disgust and amusement.

"That's revolting," Dean said, pretending to gag.

"Serves her right," I replied, watching her slip from Cormac's slobbery clutches and hurrying away through the crowd. I felt slightly depressed about the situation for a moment, seeing that it had been *my* words that had started this whole Ron-Lavender-Hermione-Cormac fiasco. I sobered up from that thought immediately. It wasn't my fault that Ron interpreted my words like he did and it wasn't my fault that Hermione chose a lumbering imbecile to extract revenge on him.

"Isn't that Rita Skeeter?" Dean asked, pointing towards the journalist chatting with a pleasant looking middle-aged woman.

"What's that foul reporter doing here?" I hissed. I thought she wasn't allowed on Hogwarts grounds. I hoped she wasn't searching for some new ways to ruin someone's life. Despite the fact that she had partially redeemed herself last February, I loathed her very existence.

Apparently a short gentleman with glasses had been wondering the same thing. He rushed over with a rather tall, creepy-looking man and proclaimed loudly, "Rita? What on earth are you doing here tonight?"

"Horace invited me, Eldred. Since I've been hired back at the paper, he was hoping I might write up a nice little article to boost his ego," Rita replied.

Eldred...? I said to myself. *That must be the author Hermione was talking about.* I wondered if she managed to meet him yet. I glanced at the man that had accompanied the writer. He hungrily stared in my direction.

"Do you think that's the vampire they said was coming?" Dean asked. "He looks the part at least."

I shushed him. Eldred had just mentioned Harry.

“...and I told him he could make loads of gold. The boy refused,” Eldred said annoyed. “You must tell me, Rita, how you ever managed such an exclusive interview with the boy last winter.”

Rita repositioned her glasses. “He was doing it to be noble,” she said, rolling her eyes. “The boy wouldn’t see a business opportunity if it was staring him in the face.”

“I think we need more people like him then,” the other woman spoke finally.

Eldred turned to her, utterly surprised that there was someone else in the conversation. “Have we had the pleasure of meeting?”

“This is Joanne Rowling,” Rita introduced. “She’s an author, too, but no where near as well known as you. Perhaps you remember her children’s story? *Rabbit and Miss Bee*?”

Eldred extended his hand and earnestly shook Joanne’s outstretched hand. “My son loves that story,” Eldred replied. “You wrote that years ago, Joanne. Surely you’ve been up to something.”

“Traveling a lot,” Joanne said. “I’ve attended several Muggle Universities abroad. They have such a fascinating culture.”

“Joanne here is what we call in the journalism world a purist,” Rita said. “Thinks a story should be told for the good of the people.”

Joanne looked at Rita with annoyance. I assumed that this has an argument they’ve had before. Joanne said, “And you think a story should only be told if it makes a galleon.”

“I have mouths to feed,” Rita retorted. She looked back at Eldred who seemed to be enjoying the banter. “What do you think?”

“Honestly,” Eldred said, “I would not write something I knew wouldn’t make my pockets heavier.”

Joanne shook her head in disappointment. “That is the growing trend around the world,” she said. “Authors, reporters...” she listed. “*The Daily Prophet* is a prime example.” She paused as she was trying to

recall the next bit of information. "In fact, the Muggle world is doing the same. Just last week, I spoke to a reporter from the *New York Times*, told me the same thing you two are telling me."

"*New York Times*?" Rita questioned.

"Muggle newspaper from the States," Joanne replied. "Going downhill fast in my opinion."

"Have you seen Hermione?"

I jumped as Cormac seemed to pop up from nowhere. I pretended that I had seen my friend near the door and told Cormac that. He went through the crowd but replacing him was the vampire that had edged his way closer to our table.

"Sanguini, I told you not to wander!" Eldred yelled, grabbing the vampire and escorting him away from our table. Keeping a firm hand on his guest, Eldred looked back to Joanne. "Would you like to meet Harry Potter?"

Joanne immediately nodded, but then shook her head. "It's already late and I have to leave...."

The four of them dispersed. Glancing over towards the door, I saw Harry slip on his Invisibility Cloak. The door opened seemingly on its own and shut again. With no further distractions, I turned my attention back to Dean.

"Care to dance?" Dean asked, as Celestina Warbeck's music began to reach our ears. It was a lovely song and perfect timing.

"Of course," I said, putting my hand in his.

We stood, and without caring whether anyone else was dancing or not, we swayed along to the music slowly. In each other's arms, we enjoyed the remainder of Slughorn's Christmas party. Maybe, if we got a chance, we would *accidentally* pass under the mistletoe.

Christmas break came and I was sad that Ron and Hermione had not yet reconciled. That meant she was most likely not coming to visit us

for the holiday season. Sitting in my room wrapping Christmas gifts for my family, I heard my door open and I turned to see who it was.

“Fred! George!” I shouted, dropping the boxes and rushing towards my brothers that I had not seen since the summer. I hugged them both and told them how much I had missed them.

Fred and George peered over my shoulder towards the pile of boxes sitting on my bed. “What ever are you doing, dear sister?” Fred asked, strolling around me and checking out the wrapping paper and gifts.

“Wrapping gifts,” I replied.

“Anything for us?” George asked, checking out the Muggle calculator that I had found for Dad at the local village.

“Luckily, I’ve already wrapped your gifts,” I said, pointing to a set of brightly colored boxes sitting on top of the finished pile. They each held a bottle of Droxy saliva that I had procured from one in the Hogwarts basement. The twins had told me they were running low and needed some.

Fred and George picked up their boxes respectively and gave them a good shake but nothing rattled. I had Mum put an anti-sneak jinx on each of the boxes for me. Disappointed, the twins gave up and turned their attention back to me.

“Did you hear the good news?” Fred asked.

“Mum might be giving you an early Christmas gift,” George said.

“What?”

“She might make Fleur room with you,” Fred said.

I groaned. *That would make my Christmas so wonderful*, I thought sarcastically. If spending so much time with Fleur in the summer wasn’t torture enough, now I might have to share the same room. I hoped Mum would change her mind.

"Why can't she just stay with Bill?" I wondered aloud. "They're going to be married."

"You know how Mum is," George replied.

Old-fashioned, I thought. I shook the thoughts of staying with Plegm out of mind and wondered if I was expected to give her something for Christmas. I hadn't thought about it and I certainly wasn't going to think about it anymore.

"How's the shop coming?" I asked, changing the subject.

"We had a rather large amount of Hogwarts orders before Christmas break," Fred said.

"Twenty love potions to twenty eager young ladies," George said.

"And we sincerely hope *you* weren't one of them." Fred said.

"I'm already dating Dean," I replied. "I don't *need* a love potion. That might be how Lavender fell for Ron though."

The twins looked at me rather excitedly and asked what I had meant by my comment. I grinned, told them the story, and asked them pleadingly to give him a hard time about. They agreed, but expressed their surprise that Ron had chosen Lavender as his snogging partner and not Hermione.

After all my observations of Harry over the past four months, somewhere along the way I had made it a game of personal pleasure to touch Harry any chance I got. Any excuse I could find, I would pat him on the shoulder, playfully smack him on the leg, even picked that nasty maggot out of his hair, just to see the reaction I would get. I noticed that any physical contact I had with him would result in the same tense response every time and I'm ashamed to admit that I had some sort of unhealthy fascination with seeing the goose bumps rise on his arms.

I was ready once again to bump Harry's foot with my foot at Christmas dinner when Mum saw our long lost brother Percy from the window, strolling up the walkway with the Minister. Percy had not yet

reconciled with us and I doubted his appearance was anything more than an excuse to bring the Minister with him.

I was right. As soon as Rufus had the chance, he invited Harry to take a stroll with him outside. Although Mum fussed over an uncomfortable Percy, the remainder of us sat in stone-cold silence, as if we had been petrified.

After several minutes of this, I pushed my chair back to excuse myself. Mum shot me the look and I paused in mid-stand up. Shaking with anger, I sat back down and looked at Fred and George, who looked equally as irritated as I was.

“How are you getting along in London?” Mum asked. I refused to think that Mum was oblivious to the real reason why Percy was standing in our kitchen after a year and a half of little to no contact.

“Fine,” Percy said nervously, trying to hide his discomfort. He put his hands on the back of Harry’s empty chair and gripped it tightly, his knuckles turning white. Although Harry was lacking red hair and freckles, he was more a part of this family than Percy.

“Are you changing your skivvies everyday?” Fred called, his eyes narrowing towards our brother. “You’ve always had trouble remembering that.”

Percy’s face went white. Mum froze in her spot, shooting looks towards Fred, daring him to ruin the homecoming.

“Join us for dinner, Percy,” George said, looking around the table for something. He picked up his own knife. “We still have the knife you stabbed us in the back with. Want me to sharpen it for another round?”

Mum placed her hands on her hips and shouted George’s name so loudly that I flinched. Not wanting to be left out of the Percy-bashing, I opened my mouth to say something but Mum shot me a look so powerful that I dared not speak. Instead, I slipped my wand from pocket and pointed it towards the table. Muttering an incantation, a scoop of mashed parsnip rose from the bowl.

Two more scoops joined my own; Fred and George had liked the idea. The three scoops hovered in the air for a second, taunting Percy and ignoring Mum. With a flick of our wands, the food splattered all across Percy's face.

He backed up, sputtering the food from his mouth and wiping it from his face.irate, he glared at us and said, "I see this was a bad idea!"

Mum started screaming at us as Percy stormed out of the house. I didn't care. It was worth whatever punishment that would come my way. Although Mum could usually scream for hours at a time, she burst into tears and ran from the kitchen. The twins looked at each other and soon followed our mother to console her.

Bill and Fleur excused themselves from the table and I looked at Dad, who had scooped up the last of his pudding and was eagerly placing the dessert into his mouth. It seemed as if he had missed the whole scene.

Ron pushed his food around his plate with his fork. Glancing around and finding Harry hadn't arrived back inside the house, I asked Ron if he was going to look for him. Ron shook his head, said that Harry wasn't about to wander, and he would be fine. I excused myself, grabbed my coat from the rack, and exited the house.

When I stepped onto the back porch, I almost tripped over Harry. He had set himself on the bottom step, staring absentmindedly into the winter night. Above us, gray clouds cast a hard shadow over the lawn and released a new bombardment of snow to join their already fallen ivory brothers that were blanketing the ground. A sudden gust of bitter wind had grabbed hold of the porch swing that Harry and I had shared so many months ago, rocking it back and forth as if an unseen specter was sitting on it.

Apologizing, he stood up to leave my presence. He took a step off the back porch into the freshly white yard and walked off. I stood at the steps watching Harry stroll away. After several feet, I could barely discern his outline. Sighing, I contemplated not following him, but I couldn't let the boy wander alone, thinking by himself.

I jumped off the porch and followed in his footprints so I didn't have to make my own. Stepping carefully onto each of his tracks, I grunted as I stretched my legs to equal his strides. After several moments, Harry stopped ahead and turned back to me, trying to figure out what all the noise was about.

"What are you doing, Ginny?" he asked, grinning at my struggles.

"I'm... trying to... catch up... with you..." I replied, jumping from footprint to footprint. "But you're much taller than me and it's not as easy to follow in your tracks."

He waited for me to join him. As I finally caught up with him, the snow was falling fiercely. The flakes were caught in both of our hair and I laughed at the sight of Harry standing there, snow melting against the warmth of his face. He looked like he had powdered sugar dumped on his head.

"Bad date with the Minister?" I asked, motioning for him to follow me back to the porch so we could get out of the falling snow.

Walking slower than usual beside me, Harry nodded, looking off towards the frozen Quidditch pitch. I'm sure he was wishing that it wasn't so miserable outside so he could release some stress by flying. He rubbed his hands together and explained what Rufus and he had spoken about.

"He called me Dumbledore's Man," Harry said, eyes twinkling at the thought.

"Thought that was an insult, did he?" I asked, noting how easy it had become for me to keep Harry grinning. "So you're on the bad side of another Minister? How do you feel about that?"

"Heartbroken, of course," he said, and shrugged the meeting off. Brushing more snow from his face, he asked, "And how did dinner with Percy go? I didn't want to intrude on the reunion."

I laughed, thinking about the food mask we had given Percy. "The first thing he should have done is apologize," I said, making a disgruntled face, and continuing the story for Harry. He thought Fred

and George's comments were harsh but humorous, and he enjoyed the meal we graciously supplied him. "Fred and George went after Mum when she began to cry," I concluded, "and I came to find you."

Harry looked startled that I would seek him out. "Why?" he asked quietly.

I shivered and wiped the snow from my eyelashes. There were many reasons why I sought him out, mostly because I would have wanted his company if I had been in Harry's situation right now.

"Maybe because there are plenty of people who care about you," I replied. Not being able to help myself, I touched his arm and added, "And I *might* be one of them."

He shuddered. Before any more reactions, I placed my foot on the first step of the porch. I slipped on the icy wood and tumbled backwards into the snow.

"Ginny!" Harry shouted, reaching for me but missing. The boy could save me from Tom Riddle's memory but not from a slick step? He looked worried but calmed down when he heard my laughing. Looking at my amused face, he broke out into a grin and offered his hand to me.

Although the snowflakes were cold against my cheek, I couldn't stop laughing. I took Harry's hand, but did not try to get up. Instead I pulled him into the snow beside me, but I suspected he could have put up a better fight.

"Ron and I used to look forward to winters," I said, moving my arms in a fan like motion, "because we would make snow angels everywhere." I moved my feet in the same fanning motion. While making my snow angel, I looked at Harry, who seemed to be lost in a gaze towards me.

"I know it's childish," I replied, grinning. "That's why you never speak of this again." As he grinned, I blew powdered snow towards his face. "Go on. Try it."

Harry looked uncertain but I batted my glistening eyelashes at him. He shrugged and followed my lead. After several arm and leg flapping, we both stood up to take a gander at our masterpieces. Side by side our faceless angels stared back up at us.

It was then that I noticed the most curious thing, perhaps created by chance alone or the unconscious actions of our minds. Grinning wide, I pointed towards our creations and replied as innocently as I could, "Look it, Harry, our angels are holding hands!"

As I suspected, Harry reacted the way he had been reacting all winter break, maybe even the same way since summer time. Turning towards the porch to retreat inside, I couldn't resist another pat on the arm and a question. "I'm going to bed. Coming?"

"What?" he sputtered, breaking his eyes from the snow angels.

I laughed again and strolled up the stairs, leaving a flustered Harry in the cold. Closing the door on him, I thought of Dean and couldn't help but feel guilty on where my thoughts were leading me. I was ashamed that, like during the summer, I did not miss my boyfriend as I knew I should. Despite our relationship improving, I once again felt like I was returning to Hogwarts to see my friend, not my boyfriend.

Glancing out the window, the falling snow was beginning to lessen, almost as if it had been falling just for us, just for that moment. The gray clouds were beginning to part and the evening sky was beginning to clear.

Something different was happening with Harry and me and, unlike the sky, that something was not yet clear.

Chapter Twelve: The-Girl-Who-Loved

When we returned from Christmas break, very little had changed. Hermione, despite my pleading, refused to talk to Ron. Ron, who refused to talk to Hermione, was back to kissing Lavender every chance he got. Harry, who was caught between the two, was still looking in my direction every moment he had.

The only thing that had changed was Dean and me. It was subtle transformation. He was resentful that we had not been able to visit each other during the holiday season and, to make matters even more uncomfortable, had caught Harry looking at me in the Great Hall.

"He's at it again," Dean whispered to me during dinner one night. "Can't he take his eyes off you for one second?"

"Maybe he's not looking at me," I replied, taking a sip of my pumpkin juice. "Maybe he's staring off into space and I happen to be in the way."

"Every single time?" Dean asked. He stuck his spoon into his pudding and scooped some out. "I don't like that he spends so much time with your family on breaks." He stuck the pudding into his mouth.

"Who else would we go with? His aunt and uncle are horrid."

He ignored my question. "Do you spend a lot of time with him?"

I rolled my eyes. "We're in the same house, wouldn't that be obvious?"

"You know what I mean."

Maybe it was the newest intimate moment that Harry and I had shared in the snow; maybe it was the fact that I was beginning to consider that Harry might be fancying me; maybe I was again realizing that Dean was a better friend than a boyfriend, but I was increasingly growing annoyed with him as the new year embraced us.

Hermione had appeared thankfully distracted from her problems with Ron after Harry's January lesson with Dumbledore. She spent a great deal of time in the library, sifting through book after book.

I joined her several days into her research as the winter wind whistled strongly outside the library windows. On the table sat a myriad of books worn out from age. Their covers were ragged and dusty. The only connecting factor between all the publications was that they each dealt with dark magic.

Slamming the last book in her collection shut, she let out an exasperated grunt as the book itself groaned. From the looks of it, whatever she had been researching could not be found anywhere in the school collection, legal or restricted.

"Need some assistance, Hermione?" I asked her, picking up a smaller book entitled in a foreign language and paging through it. I caught a glance at a gruesome picture depicting the entrails of a man being pulled from his abdomen. I grimaced and shut the book quickly.

"Well," Hermione said, "you should know by now that I can't tell you."

Although I wasn't aware that this particular research project concerned Harry's lessons, I did know that she wasn't allowed to tell me what Dumbledore taught him. That's not saying that I hadn't been trying to get it out of her, but the girl is stubborn when she wants to be.

"But seeing that *NONE* of these books have helped me *AT ALL*," she motioned towards the several stacks of books sitting beside her on the table, "I don't have anything *not* to tell you!" She let out a frustrated cry and shook her fists at the books. Defeated, she put her head on the table. She was not used to her books failing her.

The book she had been reading through sat beside her head with a ripped portion of paper placed inside, marking a page. I made little noise as I reached for it and even less noise as I slid it off the table. The cover read *Magick Moste Evile*. I opened to the marked page and skimmed over the content.

There were only two subjects on the page.... *The Horblio Curse*, named for the first Wizard to use it and explained in detail how to

explode various parts of the body... and *Horcrux*... which read, “*Of the Horcrux, wickedest of magical inventions, we shall not speak or give direction.*”

Obviously Hermione wouldn't be frustrated if she had been looking for the Horblio Curse because there were several long paragraphs dedicated to it. Reading over the explanation of the Horcrux again, I thought it fit perfectly with Lord Voldemort. He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named using the Magic-That-Must-Not-Be-Described.

“Horcrux,” I muttered to myself. As I closed the book, Hermione grabbed it from my hands and I smiled coyly at her. “Any idea what it is?”

“Ginny, drop it,” she said, placing the book that I had read from in her bag and closing it. “You probably shouldn't even know that word. If you want to assist me, help me put these books back.”

Grabbing a stack of the books, I helped her put everything in their rightful places. I could tell she meant business about dropping the subject so I guess I was going to have to find out for myself. I dared not discuss it with any of the teachers and I refused to put Dumbledore's plans, if that's what it was, in jeopardy by discussing it with students. It looked like a bit of eavesdropping might work best.

Horcrux, I repeated to myself again, *even sounds evil....*

In the beginning of February, the Sixth Years, Dean included, began their Apparition lessons. This meant that I had a morning free to catch up on homework and even some time to practice some new Quidditch moves.

As Dean had requested, I waited for him outside the Great Hall. The crowd of Apparition students passed by me. Ron and Harry rushed out of the entrance, talking to each other, and didn't even notice me.

“Don't you want to learn how to Apparate?” Ron asked Harry.

“I'm not fussed, really, I prefer flying,” Harry replied, looking over his shoulder.

They sped up and I watched them go. I shrugged off the fact that they hadn't noticed me, because there were a lot of people in the hall and they hadn't been expecting to see me there. Even so, I couldn't shake the fact that Harry, who had been noticing if I blinked more than usual, hadn't even...

"Ron's Little Sister!" Seamus called to me, standing beside Dean in the doorway. Although Dean had not used that nickname for a long time (and he better not after snogging me several times), Dean punched him in the arm and scolded him for using his nickname for me.

"Hello, boys," I said, slipping my hand into Dean's palm. "How did Apparition go?"

Dean and Seamus both retold the tale of Susan splinching herself and then went to Ernie's wonderful ballerina move. Dean had mentioned that Harry appeared distracted and I noticed contempt in his voice.

I changed the focus before I had a chance to be annoyed. "But how did the two of you do?" I asked.

"I expect we'll get better at it as the weeks go on. I honestly don't think I felt anything," Dean said.

"And you won't," came Harper's voice from behind us. The last time we met, I outscored him on the Quidditch Pitch. "I wouldn't expect your type of people to be able to do such things."

"And I'm sure you can do so much better," I said to him, rolling my eyes. Harper had another full year before he had a chance to be taught how to Apparate.

"It's okay, Ginny," Dean said, reaching into his pocket just in case he needed to use his wand against the Slytherin.

"For your information, my father has been teaching me how to Apparate," Harper said, smirking like the idiot he is. "You could ask your father," he motioned towards Dean, "but I almost forgot that you don't have one."

It wasn't Dean who moved. It wasn't me who advanced. It was Seamus, rushing forward and socking Harper in the face with such force that he fell to the floor, writhing in pain. Seamus stared at Harper, who was beginning to return to his feet. "Try it again, Julius, and you won't be getting back up." Seamus motioned for Dean and me to leave.

"Finnigan, I am surprised," Snape's voice came from the Great Hall. "If anyone were to be dueling like common Muggles, I would have assumed it to be Thomas..."

And we heard no more as Dean and I walked back to the Tower. Hand in hand, I checked Dean's face and saw that he didn't look troubled. "That didn't bother you back there?" I asked.

Dean shook his head. "I never knew my real dad," he replied. "When I was a baby, he left. Mum never knew why and she remarried a couple of years later."

I knew that his Mum was a Muggle, but I was curious about his real father. "Was your Dad... was he a wizard...?"

Dean shrugged. "If he was, Mum never knew about it."

Coming to the Fat Lady, we said the password, and we went in. Passing beneath the frame, Dean attempted to assist me through. "We've been through this, Dean," I said. "I don't need your help through it."

It took a tragedy to finally reconcile Ron and Hermione. After Ron became the unintentional victim of Draco's schemes, Hermione barely left Ron's bedside. Ron was going to be alright, thanks to Harry... *always thanks to Harry*... He had saved our family more times than we could count.

When Harry and Hermione left with Hagrid, I kissed my family and decided to call it a night. As I walked into the Common Room, I saw the last person I wanted to see, sitting on the couch, waiting eagerly.

“How’s your brother?” Cormac asked, heaving his large body off the couch. “I saw him being taken to the hospital wing. He won’t be playing in the next game, will he?”

I was astounded. “He almost died,” I hissed. “How can you be thinking of Quidditch? Are you that insensitive?”

Cormac frowned and sat back down on the couch. “I’ll wait for Harry then,” he grumbled. “All night if I have to.”

I passed by him and placed my foot on the first step up towards my dormitory. I paused, looked back at him, and pulled out my wand. Muttering an incantation, I put the idiot asleep. With another flick of my wand, I put out the candles. Hopefully the sleeping jinx would stick until Harry was safely back inside his room. It was inevitable that Ron would have to be replaced, but Harry didn’t have to deal with that tonight.

Lavender was furious that no one had bothered to tell her about Ron, who had grown surprisingly tired every time she went to visit him. Hermione, on the other hand, was in better spirits since she and Ron were back on speaking terms.

As Hermione and I walked towards the Quidditch Pitch for our game against Hufflepuff, I couldn’t be patient any more. *Something* had happened between my brother and her and she wasn’t saying anything. She had been smiling a lot more lately and looked happier than she had been in a long time.

“What’s going on with you and Ron?” I asked her. “Have you two finally...?”

“No,” she quickly answered. “We’re just speaking again. I think we’ve reached some sort of understanding...”

“You *think*?”

She blushed.

Cormac rushed by both of us, holding up his broom and yelling, "Make way!" I cringed when I thought we were forced to play with him today, but it's not like Harry really had a choice.

"I actually wanted to ask you a question," Hermione said. "I've been noticing a certain wizard giving you more and more attention."

"Who?" I asked, knowing full well who she was talking about.

"You know who," she said. "And I bet you've noticed a lot more than I have."

I opened my mouth to explain but it all sounded suddenly silly in my head. How could I explain this without sounding like a school girl with a crush? I almost excused it as being in my head, but if Hermione had noticed, maybe it wasn't just my imagination.

"Well?" she asked.

I took a deep breath and explained to her what had been happening since school started. I told her about all the times I had caught him looking at me and the reaction I got every time I touched him. I filled her in on his actions when he and Ron had caught me kissing Dean in the shortcut. I told her how even Dean had noticed and had resorted to insulting Harry.

She had a thoughtful look in her eye as she contemplated my words. Finally, she said, "He *has* been acting rather strange..." she paused again, thinking back over the last few months. "And... yes, it would make sense.... Well, then, Ginny, the only question is what you're going to do."

"What *I'm* going to do?" I asked. "In case you forgot, I'm Dean's girlfriend."

"You know perfectly well that you think of Dean more as a friend than a boyfriend," she reminded me. "And this is Harry we're talking about."

"I can't do that to Dean," I said softly. He was a wonderful person. I would feel incredibly guilty if I broke up with him just so I could date

Harry. I didn't even know if that was a plausible option at that moment. Forget the fact that I thought of Dean as something like a really good friend. Forget the fact that Dean and I had been bickering back and forth. Forget the...

"How can you not care?" Hermione asked.

"*Not care?!*" I hissed as people around us started to stare. I grabbed her quickly and pulled her into an empty classroom. "How can you say that I don't care?"

"Ginny, I didn't mean-"

I cut her off, red in the face. "Hermione, did you ever wonder why Fred and George gave up the Marauder's Map? I convinced them to give it to Harry." I pointed to myself. "Ever wonder why Cedric found Harry the night of the Yule Ball and gave him a clue for the Second Task? I remembered what you said and told Cedric that he was having trouble with it."

"Ginny, I don't-"

"And when Barty Crouch borrowed the Map, I wonder if you ever figured out how Harry got it back? Not to mention all the *hell* I put myself through when I talked to Cho..."

"Ginny, please, I didn't know-"

"Don't you dare tell me that I don't care!" I said. I wiped several tears angrily from my eyes. "The problem is that I care *too much!*"

"Ginny, if you tell Harry... I mean, you've been waiting for..."

"No!" I said, hot tears burning my cheeks now. "I can't keep doing this to myself. I waited for years for him to notice me, and if somehow by some miracle, Harry fancies me, then that's too bad..."

"Ginny..."

"*He is just going to have to wait!*" I shouted, turning from her and kicking a desk over. I refused to succumb to the tears. They were not

going to beat me. I was not going to cry over Harry Potter again. "Remember," I whispered, "I'm over Harry." But my tone was not as convincing as I wanted it to be.

Hermione sighed, knowing that I was not angry with her. "You don't mean that," she said, placing her hands on my shoulders. "I never knew you did all that for Harry." She turned me around and embraced me, and I let her. "Promise me something please."

I nodded.

"I'm going to look into this whole Harry thing," she said, taking her thumbs and wiping away two teardrops from my cheeks. "I know Dean is a good guy, but you just aren't meant for each other."

"Hermione, I..."

"Let me finish," she said. "If you have a falling out, promise me you won't go out of your way to fix it."

I looked at her with disbelief. "I can't promise something like that," I whispered, but I knew that's exactly what I'd do. If Dean and I had a big row, I wasn't about to fix it.

There I was, hours later outside the hospital wing, just staring at the door. Two of the most important people in my life were holed up in the room, recovering from injuries. Ron and Harry, the latter having been admitted maybe an hour and a half prior.

Why did I feel so guilty visiting Harry?

That was an easy question to answer. It all began during the match. Our Keeper, the *wonderful* McLaggen, had taken it upon himself to teach our Beaters how to properly do their job... in the *middle* of the game... resulting in our Captain being on the receiving end of a rogue Bludger.

I was too far away to reach Harry. Fortunately, Coote and Peakes had enough sense to catch him in mid-fall. Watching Harry's lifeless body plummeting towards the unforgiving ground had to be one of the single most terrifying scenes in my life.

That's not why I was feeling guilty though. If anything, that should have given me *more* reason to check up on Harry. No, the culprit of my guilty conscious belonged to Dean. He decided that the whole ordeal was hilarious. It doesn't take an idiot to understand what he was doing. He had been on Harry's case for months now and I was sick of it.

I let him know, too. I told him to shut up and quit acting like a lousy Slytherin. He was livid, accusing me of taking Harry's side over his and then accused me of fancying Harry. There it was. It had finally come to that. If Seamus hadn't stepped between us, I would have properly introduced him to some batty pals of mine and most likely wouldn't have a boyfriend anymore. Storming out of the Common Room, I caught Hermione's eye and she winked at me.

The door I was staring at opened and Lavender slowly stepped out. She looked so frustrated. She glanced up at me and offered her best smile. "They're not awake," she said. "In fact, Ron hasn't been awake at all when I've been visiting."

Ron, you coward, I thought. "Maybe you've just been unlucky?"

She scoffed and walked away from me, muttering something about Hermione. I watched her walk down the hallway, her head bowed low, looking at the floor.

I opened the door and was greeted with the sound of snoring. Granted, Ron usually snores, but since I had grown up with him, I knew when he was faking. The covers were pulled over his head and beside him laid the decrepit body of Harry, bandages wrapped tightly around his skull like a turban. My insides turned in knots.

Madam Pomfrey greeted me with a smile. Over the years of my friends and family being in the habit of being hurt, she and I had developed an interesting relationship. She liked and trusted me.

"Ginevra, would you be able to do me a favor?" she asked. When I nodded, she continued. "I have to run an errand. When the timer goes off," she held up a small figurine of herself and placed it on a chair, "give the boys their remedial potions." She pointed into the side

room. "Two flasks sitting on the counter in there. One for each of them."

By the time she had finished speaking and had left, Ron was sitting up in the bed. He looked pleased to see that it was me and not Lavender. "I figured you'd be hunting McLaggen down," he said.

I scowled. "Don't need to," I replied. "The rest of the team went on the prowl. Personally, I think you'll have another room mate by the end of the night."

Ron tried to hide his glee with the news. Although he didn't like Harry's close call, he loved the idea of Cormac injured. "Hopefully, Harry and I will be out by tomorrow," he said.

"Then you can pretend to be sleepwalking when Lavender is around," I teased, smirking when Ron avoided my gaze. Sighing, I said, "You know, I never apologized for what I said to you back in October. I was angry."

"But you were right," Ron said quietly.

It had been far too long since Ron and I had spoken to each other like this. Before Hogwarts, he would sneak over to my room at night and we would talk about a lot of things. "I reckon I almost ruined your chances with Hermione," I said.

Ron shifted uncomfortably in his bed. "What? I... what are you...?"

I rolled my eyes. "Have you talked to her yet?" He shook his head slowly. "Ron, *talk* to her, please."

Before he could react, the little figurine of Madam Pomfrey spoke, announcing that it was time for Ron and Harry's remedial potions. I patted Ron on the shoulder and entered the side room.

The two flasks sat on the table. I grabbed each and came to the door, but I saw Hermione standing beside the bed and heard Ron's obnoxious snoring again. I slipped out of sight and heard Hermione announce who she was. Ron stopped snoring and I suspected he sat up.

Leaning against the wall, I noted how often I coincidentally found myself listening in on things. As much as I strived to eavesdrop, I more than often found myself conveniently in the right place at the right time. *Come on, you two, TALK!*

"I can't be here for long," Hermione said. "I just wanted to drop off something for you. I figured you're still bored in here."

"Who am I going to play chess with, Hermione?" Ron asked.

"Harry is going to wake up, Ron," she said. "I suspect you'll be able to play him then. Unless you're asleep... I hear you've been sleeping a lot lately."

Silence... *Come on, Ron!*

"You know, if you're tired of Lavender, you should probably let her know."

"Not that easy," Ron muttered. Hermione must have stood up because Ron said, "Where are you going?"

"I told you that I wasn't staying long."

"But..." he said, not knowing really what to say. "I want you to stay."

"Why?"

I imagined Ron awkwardly looking towards the hospital floor, not answering.

"Ron, you're hopeless," Hermione muttered. I heard her footsteps walking away from his bed and I swore under my breath at Ron.

"Because I've missed you," Ron called out and the footsteps stopped. Ron continued, "I thought you knew that... and... I'm sorry..."

"And?"

This is your moment, Ron!

“And...” Ron said. “I hurt you real bad. I’ve been a real git... I’m glad that we’re friends again... er....”

Friends? I muttered to myself. Was he really that daft? Hermione had just spent the last five months giving Ron the cold shoulder because he was sucking Lavender’s face off. Did he really think that was a friendship reaction?

Neither of them spoke for several seconds. Finally Hermione broke the silence. “Yes, Ron, I’m glad we’re back to being *friends*, too.” There was such sadness in her voice as she said it.

“Wait, Hermione...” Ron called. “We’ve got to talk about this, don’t we?”

The door opened and Hermione greeted Madam Pomfrey. “I’ll talk to you later, Ron,” she said, and the door shut behind her.

I quickly ran out and handed Ron his flask as Pomfrey scolded me for being so late with the potions. Ron gulped his down in one swig and she took the second flask from me and assisted the unconscious Harry with consuming his.

I stared at Harry, laying there, not stirring. I imagined for a second being huddled over his body and confessing my everlasting love, but shook that thought from my mind when Ron called to me. I tore my eyes from Harry and looked at Ron. “What?” I asked.

“I called you three times,” he said, knowingly smirking. “He’ll be fine, Ginny.”

“I know,” I said, trying not to blush that my brother had caught me staring at his best mate. It had been awhile since he had done so. “He’s been so distracted lately. He almost missed the beginning of the match.”

“Really? Did he say where he was?”

“Said he met up with Malfoy,” I replied.

"I want to find out what he's up to as much as anyone," Ron replied, "but don't you think he's becoming a bit... obsessed?"

I shrugged. He was becoming increasingly distracted and not just with Malfoy. It wasn't the first time he had been distracted enough to miss a Bludger. During practices, I swear he narrowly missed injury several times, but I suspected it didn't have to do with that blond Slytherin. In fact, I thought it might have to do with a red-haired Gryffindor.

"You're staring at him again," Ron said.

Two times in one night. Either I was losing my touch or Ron was getting better. I blushed this time and walked to the other side of the bed, between the boys.

"Don't think I haven't noticed," Ron said, narrowing his eyes towards me. He placed the chess set beneath his bed to be played at a later time. "You and him have been getting along great since the summertime." He pointed at Harry. "You're just what he needs. He might not even know it yet though."

I shook my head. "I have a boyfriend, Ron."

"Wasn't it you who told me to talk to Hermione? Well, maybe you could take your own advice."

Madam Pomfrey interrupted us. "I'm sorry, Ginevra, but I can't allow you to stay much later. Harry needs peace and quiet." I told her okay and she went back to her side room.

"Ginny..."

I looked at Ron, thinking he had said my name, but Ron pointed towards the other injured person in the room. Harry, talking in his sleep, had said my name. I studied him but he didn't stir nor did he say my name again. I passed the incident off as a happenstance. After all, Madame Pomfrey *had* just said my name. I figure Harry was just repeating it.

"Feel better, Harry," I whispered.

Dean and I spent the majority of our last few days together talking about our problems. It might be needless to say, but it didn't go so well. Instead of talking, we shouted, all the time. On the last night of our relationship, we walked around the grounds, bickering, and he kept coming back to the same argument. Harry... Harry... *Harry...*

"Dean, shut up!" I bellowed. "I would never break up with you for Harry, but the idea is looking better and better because you're an idiot!"

We argued for hours. Close to curfew, we walked loudly back towards the school, but Filch had locked the entrance already. In anger, I magically unlocked the door and walked through, Dean hot on my trail. While Dean and I shouted on the way to Gryffindor Tower, Professor Sprout stepped out of her office and looked at each of us strangely.

"Everything okay, Miss Weasley? Mr. Thomas?" she asked, pulling her coat around her dusty robes. She eyed us suspiciously as she pulled her gray hair from her coat collar.

"Oh, *I'm* fine," I replied, shooting daggers towards Dean with my eyes.

Cautiously Professor Sprout said, "I must run to the gardens before the sun sets. If you see Professor Slughorn, could you send him down to meet me?"

Dean grunted and I replied positively. Sprout hurried out the door with her sack bouncing over her shoulder. Leaving Dean standing there, I rushed ahead and opened the door to the Gryffindor Tower. I would have beaten Dean up the stairwell, but as I ran through the door, I collided into Slughorn's bulbous belly.

He guffawed loudly and greeted me even louder, ignoring Dean who had just caught up with me. "Miss Weasley, what a pleasure bumping into you. I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed your essay on the Draught of Peace. Splendid work, splendid work indeed."

"Thanks, Professor," I said, also ignoring Dean and glad for an escape from all the arguing. "I'm supposed to tell you that Professor Sprout is in the gardens waiting for you."

"Is she?" Slughorn exclaimed, rubbing his belly. "I was searching for her. She promised me some Twilight Leaves. I'm sure it's obvious that now would be the best time to pick them."

When Slughorn departed, Dean grunted and looked at me angrily. "Have to pretend I'm not here, don't you?"

"I suppose it's my fault that Slughorn didn't notice you," I hissed. I bounded up the tower stairs, passing by the shortcut that Ron and Harry had caught us kissing in months earlier. "Like it's also my fault that Harry pays so much attention to me?" I shouted down the stairwell towards him.

Dean and I argued up each step, and when we finally came to the Portrait Hole, he grabbed me, turned me towards him, and kissed me hard on the lips.

I pushed him away. "Get away from me."

Dean shook his head. "Where are we, Ginny? What's happening?"

I softened my look, realizing the questions meant one thing. It had come to this and I wasn't sure if I was prepared to do what I knew needed done. Swallowing hard, I turned from him and noticed The Fat Lady eagerly awaiting my answer. "Firewhiskey," I said dully to the portrait.

"Fine," the Fat Lady replied. "Ruin my fun."

The portrait swung open and Dean walked in beside me. As I arbitrarily pictured Harry in my mind, Dean tried to assist me through the entrance. "Don't push me, please, Dean," I said annoyed. "You're always doing that, I can get through perfectly well on my own."

Dean threw his hands into the air. "I can't take this anymore! Why are you so difficult?" he shouted. "I'm done. We're done."

Before I had a chance to retort, Lavender's voice echoed all over the Common Room. "WHAT MAKES YOU SO SPECIAL?" I looked towards the entrance of the boys' dormitory. Lavender looked enraged as she cornered Hermione and Ron. Hermione looked just

as enraged. Ron looked terrified. "WHAT MAKES YOU SO PERFECT?"

A small crowd of onlookers gathered behind several couches and chairs to protect themselves from any shrapnel and to witness the scene. Lavender was red in the face; she might have been screaming for awhile now. Her hands were folded precariously over her chest, glaring at Hermione.

Hermione, who usually attempted to avoid conflict, shot an equally impressive angry stare back to the other girl. She wasn't about to let Lavender scare her. "I'm not perfect," Hermione shouted, "but I know Ron better than you could ever know him!"

"*I'm* his girlfriend!"

"You don't even know Ron!" Hermione shouted. "Tell me, Lavender, what's Ron's favorite Quidditch Team?"

"What does that matter?"

"How many times has Ron beaten you at chess?" Hermione asked. "Or didn't you know he's the best chess player in Gryffindor?"

It was obvious that Lavender had no idea. She sputtered over her words to cover for herself, muttering incoherently about being Ron's girlfriend.

"Did you know that he doesn't have a favorite food? And can *you* understand him when he's talking with his mouth full? Does he ever complain about his owl but you know he'd be devastated if he lost Pigwidgeon? Have you ever noticed that when he's trying to figure something out, he furrows his eyebrows, revealing a dimple above his left eye?"

Ron's hand shot up towards his left eye, feeling for the supposed dimple. Finding it, he smiled.

"And..." Hermione said, turning from Lavender and looking at Ron. She continued softly, "Did you know he's probably thinking right now: *Blimey, I didn't know Hermione knew all that about me.*"

Ron's eyes widened, perhaps thinking that Hermione had learned Legilimency. He looked from Hermione's soft eyes and then back to Lavender, nodding affirmatively.

Lavender shook with anger, opening her mouth several times to retort, but ultimately placed her arms against the side of her body. The onlookers could see who the clear victor of the argument was. Defeated, Lavender said, "If that's what you want, Ron... IT'S OVER!" With that, she burst into tears and ran from the Common Room.

After that night, Hermione and Ron both seemed to enjoy life a little more. I was surprised that they didn't immediately start snogging after years of unrequited love, but Hermione was right: they had reached some sort of understanding. It was then that I realized that if they were to ever decide to further their relationship, it wouldn't be for a stupid reason. First and foremost, they were friends and that took precedent over everything else.

My life, too, was a general improvement. I could talk, laugh, look, and spend time with Harry without feeling guilty and it looked as if Harry was finding any excuse to spend time with me, to place a hand on my shoulder, or to steal a glance at me. I am positive that the Bludgers that hit him during practices were because he was looking at me.

To make matters even better, Katie Bell had returned, which meant that the awkward situation that would be Dean and I was solved. Practices with Harry's original team proved to be the best in months. If we didn't win the championship, it would surprise all of us.

Several days before the match, I landed on the pitch after Harry called the practice over, smiling at the improvement Ron was showing. It appeared that a muse named Hermione had given him the boost of confidence he desperately needed.

Almost immediately upon my landing, Harry met the ground ahead of me. He looked around for someone, found me, and waited for me to join him. I grinned because he had been doing this after every practice so he could walk with me.

"You might want to start paying more attention to the actual Snitch," I said teasingly, pressing my palm against his shoulder where a

Bludger had almost taken him off his broom. I felt the familiar tension of his muscles. "I don't want to have to visit you in the hospital wing again."

"I'm the Captain," Harry replied. "I have to keep my eye out on everyone."

"Everyone, huh?" I said. "Did you see that spin move Katie performed? Or how about that crazy kick Ron had? Or Peakes and Coote when they both hit the Quaffle?" When he shook his head, I asked, "What about when I flew circles around Ron to confuse him?"

He laughed loudly, confirming that he had seen *that* one. I gave him a knowing look, doubting him with my eyes that he had been watching the whole team. He noticed but shrugged, not denying what I had insinuated.

What are you waiting for, Harry? I thought to myself.

I was almost 100 percent positive of how he was feeling towards me, but I couldn't figure out why he wasn't making a move. I had been single for almost two weeks, giving Harry plenty of time to ask me out. Maybe, I thought, he didn't even know how he felt yet.

I stole another glance at him and found such softness in his gaze, as if he was looking at me for the first time. No, he definitely knew how he felt. It was there, in his eyes. He adored me.

I could play the waiting game if that's what he wanted to do. I had waited six years and I could wait a little longer. I wasn't about to go anywhere, despite the fact that several boys, including Colin, Peakes, Coote, even Michael, probably after another breakup with Cho, had asked me out. Unfortunately for them, my heart belonged to one boy but he was taking his jolly ole time with it.

"Harry!" Ron called, catching up with us. He had impeccable timing. That could be another reason why Harry was so reluctant to reveal his feelings. He and I had barely enough time for pleasant chit-chat, let alone an emotion-filled, love-revealing conversation.

I touched Harry on the arm and flashed the best possible smile. "Will I see you at dinner, Harry?"

"Yes," he said, looking at Ron and back to me, disappointed that I wasn't staying to engage in the discussion.

"I'll save you a seat." I winked at him and ran ahead.

Without question, Harry was making this far more difficult than it needed to be. I'm not sure how he wrapped his head around the idea that I didn't fancy him. It's not like I was being discreet about it. I went out of my way to see him and spend time with the Trio. I made sure he caught me staring at him. I dropped hint after hint after hint.

I know what you're thinking, but I refused to make the first move on principle alone. I figured that I had been pining for him for years and it was his turn to suffer a bit. It would do him some good. Besides, any bloke could see where I stood. Hermione agreed, saying that it would be best to let Harry sort out his feelings on his own.

When he broke the news of his detention with Snape, he refused to look me in the eye. I wasn't angry, rather heartbroken because I was convinced our victory would be intertwined with our union, almost as if the euphoria of winning would influence Harry in my favor. While Harry addressed the team, I vowed with everything inside of me to catch that Snitch.

I honestly didn't feel like we had a chance, but when our Chasers performed with such skill and accuracy, our Beaters defended with such precision, and Ron saved with such determination, it seemed we could do no wrong. Catching the Snitch was not a problem.

The celebration began on the pitch and echoed through the halls until it eventually made its way into the Gryffindor Common Room. Before I even had a chance to drink my first Butterbeer, I was scheming, trying to come up with my next plan of action concerning Harry. I didn't know what else to do short of grabbing him and pinning him against the wall, requesting adamantly he just tell me how he felt, and I wasn't about to do that.

"That was some great flying out there," Dean said, patting me on the shoulder. This had been the first time he had spoken to me since we had broken up two weeks ago. "Listen, I wanted to let you know that I'm sorry."

"No hard feelings, Dean," I replied, patting him on the shoulder, too.

"Do you think we could give it another shot?" he asked, holding two glasses of Butterbeer in his hand and handing one to me. "A second chance?"

I shook my head, taking the glass and setting it on the table. "We would just have the same problems, Dean."

"No, no," he replied. "I promise not to accuse Harry or you or..."

"Dean," I said, holding up my hand to silence him, "I would have never broken up with you just so I could date Harry, but I think you were right. I think he does fancy me."

"Ginny, I don't care..."

"But I've also realized something else."

Hermione nudged me. "Ginny," she said in a singsong voice and motioned towards the door.

Ron announced to someone that we had won. I peeked through the crowd, seeing the familiar face of our Captain. He wasn't paying attention to Ron, but searching the mob for something.

Or someone...

And before I knew it, I pushed Dean away from me and jumped from my seat, running full throttle towards the boy in the portrait hole. His eyes stopped scanning and focused directly on me, a hard blazing look that must have matched my own greeted me.

We won, Harry, we won we won we won. I kept repeating this with each thump of my feet, ready to shout it as soon as I hit his arms. I jumped directly into his body, opened my mouth and said, "We..."

He... was... *kissing*... me....

A dream, it had to be a dream. A very lifelike and realistic dream but I didn't care. I didn't want anyone to pinch me awake. If it was a dream and I was sleeping, I hoped beyond hope that I could remain in this slumber forever.

But it wasn't a dream, it was real. His hands were real as they gripped my back. His lips were real as they glided hungrily over my own. His body was real as he pulled me closer. I was real, kissing Harry, *kissing Harry*! That moment was real and it didn't matter that fifty people were watching, it didn't matter that one of them was my brother, it didn't matter that one of them was an ex-boyfriend. All that mattered was Harry, me, the kiss, and the one that was sure to follow.

I might still be kissing him if he hadn't pulled away. I kept my eyes closed, whimpering only slightly that my source of life had been unceremoniously taken from me.

I could feel the eyes of everyone staring at us. Someone coughed. I felt Harry's hand slide directly into mine as he led me outside the Portrait Hole. I heard whoops and hollers. I imagined Hermione's smug look, Ron's bewildered look, and Dean's I-can't-believe-what-just-happened look.

As the Portrait Hole shut behind me, I let go of Harry's hand. I leaned against the Fat Lady's picture who had taken a small trip to a barrel of wine several frames away. I let out a long heavy sigh, still trying to comprehend what had just happened.

Harry stood in front of me, barely looking at me, and turning redder as the seconds fell away. He looked adorable, blushing over the fact that he had finally overcome a mountain and kissed me. "I'm sorry, Ginny," he said. "I... don't know what came over me... I...."

"Oh *shut up*!" I whispered, grabbing him by the arms, swinging him around, and pressing him against the portrait. I kissed him hard and fierce, allowing the six years of pent up adoration out of its cage. It was a wild creature, desperately pleased to be broken from its prison, and I was quite sure that once it was out, there was no forcing it back in.

Pulling away from Harry to catch my breath, I said, "I have wanted to kiss you, Harry Potter, since the first day I met you. Don't you dare apologize for something I obviously wanted you to do."

Would he ever stop grinning? He stared at me with such admiration. There usually was so much sadness hidden behind those glasses, but I no longer saw that. All I saw was my face reflected in his eyes. I could get used to that.

"I just kissed you in front of the whole Common Room," he said slowly, perhaps finally realizing precisely what he had just done. He laughed hard.

I smirked. "Yes, you did," I replied, running my hand through his shadowy locks. "What took you so damn long?"

"Well, you know how Snape is," he said, his eyes twinkling. "I would have been here sooner, but he insisted I stay..." I scowled my face playfully, telling him that's not what I meant. He shrugged innocently, insinuating that he knew perfectly well what I meant. "I don't know. I honestly don't know."

He took my hand and jerked his head towards the stairwell. A nice long walk seemed appropriate, I decided, since it was sunny and beautiful. *Okay, okay*, it would even been a perfect day if it was raining and storming. Side by side, we traveled down the stairs. We didn't talk about where we going and I don't think it mattered.

I couldn't suppress another big sigh and a happy giggle. So many things I wanted to point out to him, such as the invitation to Hogsmeade, the offer to sit with me on the train, the summer moments together, even the moment back when he needed to talk to Sirius... could it really have gone back that far? But there would be time to discuss everything. I didn't need to hurry.

We passed by the shortcut and I was taken back to a moment so long ago. Harry must have been thinking the same thing because he said, "I wanted to hurt Dean when we caught you kissing him. I was so confused. I thought..."

"That you were acting like a big brother," I finished for him.

"Yeah, how did you know?"

"I saw that look you gave us," I replied. "I tried to make the same excuse for you. I didn't want to believe you had finally fallen for me."

"You didn't want to believe?" he repeated. "Why?"

"I was trying to be over you, Harry," I said, shaking my head from side to side. "Obviously, in light of recent events," I held up our entwined hands that linked together so perfectly, "I was dreadfully unsuccessful."

"Unsuccessful, huh?" He repeated, squeezing my hand, and looking away from me in mock anger. "You might be disappointed, but I am grateful you failed at one thing."

"Oh, I didn't fail," I jokingly said back to him. "In case you haven't noticed, I'm completely over you. No feelings whatsoever."

"Right."

"Don't believe me?" I said, shrugging. "Fine. Kiss me and you'll see." I stopped in the hallway and pointed to my mouth, tapping my lips several times. "Go on."

Harry leaned in, kissing me again, and we shared the third smooch that day, but it felt like the first time again. I could easily see us wasting away, finally able to enjoy each other's company properly. *This is not going to be good once my OWL exams come*, I thought.

It was only when a small cough interrupted us did we part from our session. Dumbledore, in his purple robes and half-moon spectacles, was standing before us. Was he grinning, too? I looked down at our hands and Harry immediately let go.

"No, no," Dumbledore said, his eyes gleaming. "I did not mean to intrude upon your private corridor." He motioned around to the several classrooms that were there. "I was on my way up to the Common Room to congratulate you and maybe, if there was any left, partake in a cold glass of Butterbeer."

"If you want some, you better get up there fast," I replied. "Ron looked awfully thirsty."

"Of course," Dumbledore replied as Harry slipped his hand back into my own. "It's unfortunate that you missed the game, Harry."

"I really wanted to be there," Harry said. "But Snape insisted-"

"*Professor* Snape, Harry," Dumbledore replied. "But you would be proud of your replacement out there today." He motioned towards me. "She flew excellently and displayed real leadership qualities in your absence."

"She'll be Captain when I'm gone," Harry said, and I blushed.

Dumbledore nodded thoughtfully. He strolled around us and bid us farewell. Before turning, he said to me, "Miss Weasley, I am pleased to see you have translated the heart correctly."

"Thank you, Professor." Without another word, Dumbledore walked away from us and we continued on our own walk. When Harry gave me a questioning look, I informed him of the Headmaster's words to me in October. "I'm certain he knew before you did."

"Do you think he read my mind?"

I shook my head. "No offense, Harry, but you were painfully obvious."

"Except to myself and to you."

I noted how alike we were. As we strolled the school hand in hand, we continued to talk openly about our feeling and laughed and teased each other at how daft the other truly was. Somehow, without really planning it, we were beside the lake and beneath a tree, my spot at Hogwarts when I needed a place to reflect. How appropriate that we found that particular location.

Facing each other, he placed his hand on the side of my face. I closed my eyes, enjoying his skin against mine. He took the long strand of red hair that was against my cheek and tucked it back

behind my ear. He said softly, "If you paid more attention to your homework, this piece wouldn't fall out so much."

I cocked my head curiously to the side. I tend to play with that strand of hair an awful lot, especially when I'm concentrating. He *had* been watching me. It was sweet of him to notice something so trivial. "What else have you noticed about me, Mr. Potter?" I asked.

"You don't eat breakfast as much as you should. Instead you take your broom for a fly," he said, almost embarrassed that he had been caught spying on me, but utterly pleased to be reliving the moment. "When I couldn't sleep, I'd see you out on the Pitch." He met my eyes and I urged him to continue. "You look so free out there, the wind blowing your every trouble away."

"You feel the same way," I replied. "Up there, nothing can reach us, not even the nightmares. When you actually took your eyes off me and focused on the Snitch, that's when I noticed it."

Caught again, he said, "It was you who left the trick telescope in my room." After a shocked expression on my face that he figured me out, he continued, "You always know how to deal with me, like when I wanted to talk to Sirius. Makes me wonder what else you've done for me over the years." He looked at me curiously,

I smiled mischievously, pleased that he had figured out some of my secrets. "You'd be surprised, Harry." I buried my body into his and his arms wrapped around me. Nothing could beat this moment.

He breathed me in and suddenly exclaimed, "That smell!"

I leaned back, looking into his eyes. "What's wrong?" I asked, touching my hair and sniffing it. "Do I smell bad?"

"No," he said, laughing. He smacked himself in the head and had a dumbfounded look on his face. "Have you always smelled like flowers?"

"Yeah," I said, confused. I had been bathing with the same scented soap and shampoo for years. It was a gift from Mum every birthday

and Christmas. It was all mine because it was far too girly for my brothers.

“On the first day of Slughorn’s class, he showed us four potions,” Harry said, his eyes gleaming. “Felix Felicis, Veritaserum, Polyjuice, and...”

“Amortentia,” I finished for him, slowly understanding what he was getting at. “Don’t tell me you...”

“I did,” he said, breathing in the scent of my hair, and losing himself in the intoxicating aroma. “It smells differently, according to what attracts us the most. I can’t believe I missed it.” He groaned and shook his head in disbelief.

“You’re not missing it now, that’s all that matters,” I said, feeling his chest rise and fall against my own. “Now that you’re my boyfriend, I’ll make sure we make up for lost time.”

“Boyfriend?” he repeated. “Rather presumptuous, are we?” He poked me playfully in the ribs and I shuddered, hoping he didn’t realize that was where I was most ticklish. “Besides, I thought you were over me. No feelings whatsoever...”

“Yeah, well, I’ve changed my mind. Got a problem with that?”

“Not in the slightest.”

We spent the rest of the afternoon under that tree, missing dinner in the process. Before we even realized, curfew had rolled around and we rushed towards our dorm rooms. Happier than we’d been in a long time, we kissed goodnight for several minutes and then each of us went to bed. Walking into the dormitories, I noted that we never had a chance to talk about the game. Before I had another moment to reflect, Hermione grabbed me, pulled me into her room, and made me spill all the details.

Being Harry’s girlfriend was a dream come true, a victory for every star-crossed girl with a crush, a triumph for that little child listening to the stories of Harry Potter growing up and swearing to her mother that he would be her life. My patience paid off and it wasn’t because I

had impressed the boy or won him over with something I was not. I had captured his heart by being me- fiery, crimson-haired Ginevra Molly Weasley.

On the way to dinner a week later, Harry pulled me into the shortcut near Gryffindor Tower. It was the same place he had discovered me kissing... kissing who? I couldn't believe I had ever kissed anyone other than Harry.

"Hermione scolded me today for distracting you," Harry said as his lips swept perfectly over mine for several seconds. "She said you needed to be studying."

"I do," I replied unconvincingly. "But this isn't study time I'm missing, it's dinner time." I kissed his lips eagerly and noted that we also couldn't afford to miss another meal. By the rate we were going, Harry and I would starve due to all the meals we skived. Leaving his lips, I remarked, "I talked to Professor McGonagall today about my career path."

"How did that go?"

I shrugged. I envisioned the Gwenog Jones card that was sitting on my nightstand. "You don't need OWLs to be a Quidditch player. That's what I want to do."

Harry agreed. "Bet your Mum will love that."

She would be ecstatic, I thought sarcastically. I explained that McGonagall had said that I should have a back-up plan in case professional sports didn't work out. She suggested work in the Department of Magical Games and Sports, which made a lot of sense. I only needed three NEWTs to get a job there and I figured I could handle it.

"You want to have lunch by the lake tomorrow?" Harry asked.

I chewed my lip in thought. "As tempting as it sounds, I *do* need to study. Hermione made me these nifty study cards. I think she'd be disappointed if they weren't put to good use."

He frowned slightly. "This is torture, you know this, right?"

"Once exams are over, I promise we'll stop wasting valuable kissing time," I replied.

"I can help you study," Harry replied, trying to find a way to spend time with me. "For every question you get right, you get a reward."

"And I'm sure I'll love the reward," I said, nipping at his nose playfully. "Okay, Harry, as long as you promise to help me study too."

He nodded, and kissed me again.

"You know, Harry," I said, looking around the corridor, "it's dangerous to be kissing here. Older brothers might catch us."

"I'll fix that," he said. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled a silvery cloth from the depths of his robes. I gasped in delight as he threw the Invisibility Cloak around the two of us. "Better?" he asked.

"I knew this thing would come in handy someday," I whispered.

The following day, Harry had spread a blanket beneath our tree. With a lunch of corned beef sandwiches and chips, we laid beside the lake, enjoying the shade sheltering us from the increasingly warming weather. He shuffled through a stack of note cards that Hermione had graciously created for me.

"Where are Ron and Hermione today?" I asked, munching on a few chips with my head propped on Harry's torso. I looked out towards the lake and watched a mermaid surface.

"Visiting Hagrid, I think," Harry answered. He stopped sifting through the cards and read, "Who is the only known maker of the Sorcerer's Stone?"

That was an easy one. The Trio had saved the stone from Voldemort in their first year, delaying his return by several years. "Nicolas Flamel," I answered. "Now reward me."

He bent low and kissed me sweetly on the lips. He flipped to the next card and read, "What is the name of the sorceress who attempted to overthrow King Arthur and is believed to be his half-sister?"

That one was a bit tougher. I tried to recall what Professor Binns had said about King Arthur and the history around his life, but it was difficult to pay attention in his class. Defeated, I shrugged.

"Morgana," Harry said and I made a mental note to remember her. He flipped to the next card and read, "Which evil wizard was defeated by one-year-old Harry Potter..." He trailed off, not wanting to finish the question.

Spending time with me had distracted Harry from his destiny. It had hit him hard to remember what it was going to take to live peacefully. I took the cards from his hands and placed them beside me. I sat up and hugged him tightly, bringing him closer to me. After kissing his forehead, I looked into his eyes. "You don't have to carry this all alone," I said. "I'm here. Let me bear some of the burden."

He didn't meet my eyes. He wasn't aware of how much I knew, how much I understood. He wasn't aware that I knew about the prophecy and that I realized we might be loving on borrowed time. And much like I had known he needed to sort out his feelings for me, I also knew he must decide on his own how much to tell me.

"I can't," he whispered. "Please don't be mad at me. I..."

"Shh." I placed my index finger against his lips to quiet him. "I know there are things you can't tell me. Believe me, I've tried to get it out of Dumbledore and Hermione. By the way, you have to teach me how to cast that spell. All that buzzing in my ears is annoying."

Harry looked amused. "Have you been eaves-dropping?"

"You wouldn't know half the things you know if you didn't eavesdrop," I said, winking at him. "All I want you to do is promise me that when you're done with whatever you need to do with Voldemort, no more secrets."

Looking almost sick to his stomach, he said, "Ginny, I don't even know..."

I cut him off, knowing he was going to say he didn't know if he'd make it out alive. "When you're done, no..." *kiss ...*"...more..." *kiss* "...secrets..."

"I promise, Ginny." He breathed heavily, letting out a sigh, thinking about his future. "How much do you know anyhow?"

My eyes sparkled. "You have your secrets, I have mine."

I pressed my forehead against his and stared deep into his eyes. His pupils glistened, matching my own. A gust of wind wrapped my hair around his head. In that moment, I wanted to tell him how much I cared about him, how much I loved him despite only dating him for a short amount of time, and how hard I'd try to keep him with me as long as I could.

"You're amazing," he said, mirroring the look I had on my face. Gripping each of my hands in his, he looked as if he wanted to express himself in the same way I was thinking. He spoke, his voice suddenly hoarse, "Ginny, I lov-"

"Harry!" Ron called from afar. Looking towards the hill, Ron and Hermione were walking towards us, carrying their own picnic basket and blanket. Hermione waved.

I grunted and whispered to Harry. "Perfect timing, they have, don't you think?" I pecked him on the lips and sat back, returning the waving gesture.

Stolen moments in Hogwarts, the life I always sought to live, the life that was torn from the pages of another's story and claimed as my own. It was us kissing, laughing, and loving but yet it couldn't be us. It most certainly could not be us.

It was good. Finally spending the time with the Trio was good. Snuggling with Harry after long hours of studying was good. Seeing the pleasant looks on Ron and Hermione's faces were good. Harry

attempting in utter failure to sneak up on me beneath his Cloak was even good.

"Hello, Harry," I called to the air in front of me. I peered over my Potions book towards the other side of the table.

The disembodied head of Harry appeared there. He scowled and a hand pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. "How do you do that?"

I shrugged, turning the page of the book. "I don't know, I just sense you," I said as he took a seat across from me. "Mum always said that people in love share a special magical connection beyond normal relationships. Have you ever been to a Wizarding wedding?" When he shook his head, I went on. "The bride and groom are bonded for life, not just physically, but magically."

"In love?" Harry repeated, letting the Cloak fall to the chair around him, revealing the upper portion of his body. "Wizarding weddings? Ginny Weasley, are you proposing?"

I laughed, pressing my foot against his own. "What if I am?"

I couldn't ask for more, spending time with Harry, stealing these moments in the library and corridors. It was good. It was *perfect*.

I should have known it couldn't last.

--

I stepped over a lifeless body. I peered down at it. Harry upon the floor, bleeding, dying, dead.

I looked around and realized I was back in the Chamber of Secrets.

I heard a sinister laugh pulsate around me.

Looking ahead, Harry stood there, but how could that be? He was dead at my feet, but this Harry was transparent. Was he a ghost? A soul wandering the earth in the form of a phantom? "Ginny," Harry called to me, "you let me die. Voldemort killed me."

"No! It wasn't my fault."

"You didn't save me!"

--

"NO!"

I bolted up in bed. Hermione was approaching me cautiously and I stared at her confused. "What's wrong?" I asked, trying to read her curious look. "Is he here?" I shouted, thinking back to my nightmare and trying to separate reality from fantasy. "Is Voldemort here?"

"No." She shook her head, handing me a small phial. "Harry wants you to drink this. He asked me to say goodbye for him because--"

"Goodbye?" I shrieked and panicked. "What do you mean? Where's Harry? What's going on?" My mind focused on what I saw, Harry dead on the ground, and I had not been able to save him.

"Calm down!" Hermione shouted. "Drink that and follow me. I'll explain everything that I can."

Hours later, the one strand of hair that never stayed secure was joined by plenty of its companions. Black smudges stained my face. I checked my robes only to find several burn holes where the spells had missed me. Thanks to Harry. *Always thanks to Harry.*

I stood hundreds of feet below the fading Dark Mark. I followed the slender tower to the ground below, once again drinking in the scene before me. Harry was crouched beside a body, a familiar figure with silver hair and beard, purple robes, and half-moon spectacles still perched on his crooked nose. The still body looked as if he had fallen from far above. Hagrid stood beside Harry, his hand on his shoulder, urging the boy to come with him.

For several moments, I forgot who had sent me there and why. The shock of seeing my headmaster sprawled on the damp earth like a broken ragdoll took control of my senses. Someone spoke and it was then that I realized that a small crowd had gathered around me.

"C'mere, Harry..." Hagrid said, tugging Harry's sleeve to take him away from the horrible scene. He looked so helpless despite that fact that he could have lifted Harry without a problem.

"No." His words were cold and far away, much like, but also so much different than the way he spoke after Cedric's death and the way he spoke after Sirius fell through the veil. They weren't the words of the boy I had been kissing for the last few weeks.

"Yeh can' stay here, Harry," Hagrid said desperately as fist-sized teardrops fell to the grass. "Come on, now..."

"No," Harry repeated, tightening his grip on the robes of Dumbledore.

He needs you, I thought to myself. *Snap out of it!* I broke free from the shock, departed from the crowd, and gripped Harry's hand. "Harry," I whispered in his ear, "Come on." I pulled him up and he obeyed just as I knew he would.

After all stories were told and retold, Madam Pomfrey chased everyone from the hospital wing to allow the injured rest. Out of pure curiosity, I didn't immediately return to Gryffindor Tower, instead I made my way back to the scene of the night's events.

Part of the ceiling lay upon the floor. Places where spells missed and rebounded were marked by scorches and broken stone. I stepped over pools of blood that stained the floors, walking cautiously around the spilled life and grime and pausing at the stairs.

The dark magical protection would have been lifted long ago but I remembered vividly how Neville had been thrown back. Still, I hesitated, wary that a Death Eater had stayed behind to continue the mayhem, maybe even to locate Harry and claim two victims tonight. Ignoring the fear, I took the stairs to the room above.

It was eerily silent and told no tale. Whatever story that had taken place within the boundaries of this tower, the room refused to speak about it. No signs of struggle, no marks to indicate anything significant had taken place, and no sympathy for the fallen. The stars peered in from the opening in the ceiling, shining in the sky. If they

cared at all, it didn't show. I shivered, though no bitter wind had found its way into the tower.

I wasn't sure what I was expecting to find. Maybe I was searching for an answer, a loophole that someone had missed. Maybe solace, maybe the same comfort mourners search for when they visit Godric's Hollow and scribble messages at the Potter House.

I imagined that years from now a plaque would sit there in that room, indicating to future students what had happened, reading, "*Here Fell the Greatest Wizard and Headmaster of Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore, the only one Lord Voldemort ever feared...*"

That didn't matter anymore. The only one he ever feared was gone and now he feared no one. What was going to stop him from rising to power? The wizard who stood so strongly against the opposition lay cracked and broken with very little effort. Who would stand now?

I knew the answer before I even asked the question. Harry would stand. Voldemort was responsible for so much loss in his life and I knew Harry would not rest anymore until he did something about it. Whatever he and Dumbledore had been planning, Harry would have to do it on his own and he wasn't going to allow me to come with him.

I backed up against the wall and began to weep. Hot tears spilled from my eyes as I thought about Dumbledore, about Harry, and about what was coming, what was imminent. Sliding down the wall to meet the floor, I didn't want to admit the unavoidable reality. Not only would Harry refuse to let me follow him, he was going to...

My foot brushed against cloth on the floor but nothing was there. Placing my hands into the empty air, I felt the recognizably smooth fabric of Harry's Invisibility Cloak. Gripping it tightly, only one thing mattered to me. Returning the Cloak to Harry might have felt like a feeble victory but I *needed* to deliver it to him, almost as if I returned this familiar piece of Harry's life to him, I would be restoring a little bit of what he lost tonight.

I wrapped the Cloak around my trembling body although I doubted anyone would care that I was wandering around. It was for my sake because I didn't want to talk to anyone or to answer any questions.

News would spread quickly that Harry had witnessed the night's events and since I was his girlfriend, it would be assumed that I knew as well.

There were plenty of people still in the Common Room when I entered through the portrait hole. If they cared that no one had walked through, they didn't show it. Dean merely glanced towards the vacant entrance before returning to his conversation with Seamus. Lavender and Parvati sat together weeping on the floor.

When I tiptoed into Harry's room, I could hear Ron's snoring. I didn't hear any other heavy breathing and I knew that Harry still had not fallen asleep. Before I could announce my presence, Harry whispered from the darkness, "Hello, Ginny." A wand lit up on the bed and I saw his strained face.

I lowered the Cloak and revealed myself. Half-smiling, I asked weakly, "How did you know it was me?"

"I sensed you," he answered simply. He opened the drawer on his bedside table and lowered something into the confines. Metal met wood as he let go and he motioned for me to join him.

"I got your cloak back," I said, laying it on the floor and snuggling up next to him on the bed. I pressed my head against his chest as he made a noise of understanding. "I needed to see you."

"I can't sleep."

I nodded, understanding. The images, those horrible images must be playing and replaying themselves over in his head. I wanted desperately to clean his mind of all thoughts and allow him a sleepless night but the world would not have changed when he awoke.

"After you rescued me from the Chamber," I said, not knowing where the strength was coming from to speak. "Dumbledore visited me in the hospital wing. I thought I was weak for trusting the diary, but he refused to let me think that. He said I was destined for great things... and he said you were, too."

I felt a tear slide onto my head that must have run off his cheek. "He always knew what to say to make me feel better," Harry whispered. "He could always make sense of everything. How can I make sense of this without him?"

I gripped him closer to myself, afraid that if I let go, he might slip from my grasp and I'd never hold him again. He held me tighter than he had ever held me before: too frightened to relax because he didn't want to lose another person he loved so dearly. The embrace awakened both of our emotional wells and before we knew it, we were sobbing uncontrollably together. Liquid despair escaped from our eyes in violent streams and I swore I'd never be able to dam this uncontainable river of sensations.

The tears soon became too much and we could cry no more. My hair was damp and his chest was wet where our eyes had spilled their clear blood. No words were needed anymore, the silence was more inviting.

I hiccupped, breaking the quiet, and I felt it was appropriate to speak again. "I heard all the stories about you when I was growing up," I whispered. "About how you were a great wizard with extraordinary power."

"Is that why you had a crush on me?" he asked softly.

"Maybe at first," I said quietly, but then shook my head lightly. "But it couldn't have been that, because when I first saw you, I didn't know who you were."

He swallowed the lump in his throat and attempted a smile. "I was so lost that day," he whispered.

"You looked adorable," I teased, remembering the scene as if it had happened only yesterday. "When you looked at me the first time, my heart skipped a beat." The memory gave me hope. "It wasn't your scar, it wasn't your power, and it wasn't because you were famous..." I repositioned myself to gaze into his face. "I think it was your eyes."

His eyelids looked heavy and his breathing had become deeper. Upon his reddening cheeks, a smile crept slowly into view. Before

fully closing his eyes, he muttered, "Stay... with me tonight." He said nothing else.

"Of course I will," I whispered to my slumbering boyfriend. I reached up and pulled his glasses off carefully. Opening the drawer, I placed them beside a locket and stared at it curiously. I picked it up and let it dangle between my fingers. Was this what he had been gripping when I had come in here tonight? I brought Harry's lit wand closer and carefully opened it. Inside was a piece of parchment. Swallowing hard, I took it out and read the note.

To the Dark Lord

I know I will be dead long before you read this but I want you to know it was I who discovered your secret. I have stolen the real Horcrux and intend to destroy it as soon as I can. I face death in the hope that when you meet your match, you will be mortal once more.

R.A.B.

There was that word again: Horcrux. Very little helped me understand any more about what it was, but that phrase "*you will be mortal once more*" sent shivers through my body. It was not the time, I decided, to worry about it. Once I was able to pull myself back together, I would consider the information more. I stuffed the note back into the locket, placed the locket back into the drawer, and extinguished Harry's wand.

I kissed my boyfriend on the lips ever so softly and cuddled up closer to him. He was asleep, which he deserved more than anyone else tonight. I sighed heavily, pulled the Invisibility Cloak over top of me, and fell asleep in his arms.

As the days waned on, Harry, Hermione, Ron, and I spent all of our time together. Two mornings before Dumbledore's funeral, I awoke and found Harry sitting in the Common Room, staring into the fire, his palm gripped around something that I guessed was the locket.

"Been thinking, have we?" I asked, coming up beside him and embracing him. "You woke up last night, didn't you?"

Harry nodded his head and placed the object into the pocket of his jeans. "Immediately after you left."

I nodded and thought about Ron the night prior. He was stirring all night and I didn't think it would be wise to be sleeping in Harry's bed when big brother awoke. I slipped off to my own room about a half-hour after I had put Harry to sleep.

I lifted my hand and brushed some hair out of his eyes. My fingers swept across the scar and Harry flinched. He closed his eyes and breathed in heavily, perhaps remembering what he needed to do. Swallowing hard, he reopened them and looked at me.

I had been expecting this look since that night Dumbledore died. He was going to break up with me because he felt it was his fault that Cedric died, that Sirius died, and that Dumbledore died, and he refused to put me in any more danger by being my boyfriend.

"Ginny, I-"

I placed my finger against his lips. "Not yet," I whispered.

He closed his eyes and nodded, shaking, trying to stay strong, because to let me go would mean that he was letting go of his best source of comfort, the only one who could put him to sleep at night without the aid of magic, the love he had been searching for all year long.

When I had Hermione alone later, I sat her down and requested for the millionth time for her to reveal everything she knew about Harry and the Horcruxes. As I expected her to, she refused and said that nothing had changed even if Dumbledore was gone.

"He's going to break up with me, Hermione," I said flatly.

Hermione nodded, noting that she had noticed the same look in his eyes. "Dumbledore gave him a job to do," she said. "I don't think he's coming back to school."

"Then I'm going with him," I replied straightaway.

Hermione shook her head. "You know Harry won't let you," she said softly.

I started to retort, but stopped. If it had been anyone else but Harry, there would be no way I'd listen to him. "I don't want to stay behind," I said quietly. "I've always been left behind."

"You've *got* to stay here," she reasoned. "You've got to give him something to hope for, something to come home to."

"If he won't let me go, you can't let him go alone," I pleaded. "I *cannot* lose him."

"Ron and I have already talked about it," she said. "We're going, whether he asks us to or not."

A great man died that year. Albus Dumbledore, the most powerful Wizard I ever knew, was buried that June in front of a crowd of thousands. Dumbledore, a man who always listened, a man who always encouraged, a man who always was there to save us, could not be saved himself.

I cried, not for Dumbledore because his battle was over, but for the ones left behind who would have to fight another day without his guidance, for the student of Hogwarts who would never experience his idea of a few words, and for Harry who would be embarking on a journey that would stretch his sanity to the limit. I cried because, like everyone around me, I didn't understand.

And the moment I had been dreading for days finally arrived. Harry, with eyes glistening, looked at me finally after the service was over. I had stopped crying by now and I returned his gaze, trying to emulate the same look he had grown so fond of. I couldn't make him put it off any longer. It would have to be now.

I knew he was right and I knew there could be no other way but it didn't make it any less hard. I listened to him, knowing full well that I had the power to make him change his mind, that if only I kissed him long enough, he would forget about what he needed to do, and run away with me. But even though I had that power, I refused to use it.

I watched him walk away from me without a kiss or a hug or even a handshake. Even the slightest touch from me would shatter what he had been brave enough to accomplish. There was so much that I never had a chance to do... wish him luck, discuss our lives in detail, or even let him know that I loved him.

Luna sat down beside me, placing a hand upon my shoulder, and wiped a few tears from my cheeks. She peered towards my newly-formed ex-boyfriend and asked, "Are you waiting for Harry?"

I knew what she meant. He was busy talking to Rufus, probably once again infuriating the Minister. Luna was merely asking if I was lingering until Harry was done speaking to him. But for me, as I smiled, the question was deeper and more meaningful. "Yeah," I answered. "I'm waiting for Harry."

And I cried, not because of a broken heart, but because Harry might die. And I was strong, because that's what he needed me to be. And I understood, because to be anything else would be selfish.

They called him the Chosen One, the one person destined to destroy Voldemort but to me, he was Harry. They also called him the Boy-Who-Lived despite the fact that he was never allowed to live freely.

And I loved him and I would continue to love him as I waited for him and I would love him until the day I died. And if he died in this war, I would visit his grave every day and place flowers and my heart upon the sodden earth. I would never love another one again, and when I died, I would make them bury me beside him, and all would know that Ginevra Molly Weasley died in love.

They called him the Boy-Who-Lived...

...Call me the Girl-Who-Loved...

Chapter Thirteen: Approaching Destiny

Sitting on the edge of my bed, I stared out the window towards the rising sun. The rays of light bathed our Quidditch Pitch in dawning colors and I couldn't help but think about playing Harry out there last summer. I rubbed my eyes in exhaustion. It had been a sleepless night for me. I wondered if it had been the same for Harry.

The reality was still setting in. It was only yesterday that I had arisen from sleep still being someone's girlfriend. It was only yesterday that I was still being held, and kissed, and loved. I wrapped my arms around myself and imagined it was him, scolding myself for thinking he no longer cared.

It might have been easier if that really was the case.

There was a soft knock on my door. I considered not answering, making the unknown visitor think I was asleep, but I needed the company, whoever it was. I needed something genuine instead of the haunting images of Harry. I muttered a half-hearted invitation to the unidentified knocker.

The door slowly opened and Ron cautiously stepped in from the hallway. From the dark circles beneath his eyes, I figured he had not slept either. He ran his hand through his red hair and hesitated before meeting my gaze. Had Ron known all along that Harry had planned to ditch me?

"You okay?" he asked with more confidence than he was displaying.

"No," I answered truthfully.

"Do you want me to thrash him?" Ron asked.

I smiled. The protective side of my older brother was one of my favorite things about him. Of course, it was also the most annoying and bothersome, especially when it extended to my kissing habits. "No, Ron," I replied. "Thanks for the offer though." I held my hand to out to him and he took it. I pulled him close to me and leaned my head on his shoulder. "Do you really have to go?"

Ron nodded, moving the bed up and down slightly. "I've been watching his back for six years, Ginny. You know I have to."

"Promise me you'll take good care of them."

"I don't think-"

"Promise me that you'll watch over them..." I whispered.

"I promise I'll try my damndest," he replied, studying me for several moments, perhaps to consider if he wanted to further this part of the conversation. Finally, he nodded, and said, "Did you hear about Tonks and Lupin?"

"Other than how they're finally in love?" I asked. I mentally kicked myself for missing that one. For a girl who prided herself in her knowledge, I sure had been completely ignorant and shamefully uninformed of their love affair.

"They're getting married in two weeks," Ron said. "Moving right along, aren't they?"

"Married?" I squealed as much of the despair that had plagued me slipped away. I was happy for them. If anyone deserved a bit of bliss, surely it was those two. "Are we invited?"

Ron nodded his head. "Any Weasley that can make it," he replied. "And Hermione, too."

Hermione had gone home after Dumbledore's funeral to take care of a few personal matters. Although we hadn't talked about it before she left, I suspected that it had to do with her parents, to say goodbye in case the quest she was embarking on failed. "When is she getting here?" I asked.

"Monday next week."

The week went by slowly. Trying to separate my mind from everything that had been going on, I shackled myself up in the attic, pouring through yearbooks of my parents, searching for the mysterious R.A.B. that had taken the real Horcrux. I had no success.

As I was looking through Mum's old yearbook in my room, someone knocked on my door. I invited the guest in and looked up. Remus walked in with a small box.

"Remus!" I greeted. "I heard about the engagement. Congratulations."

Remus set the box down upon my bed and thanked me. "Are you coming to the wedding?" he asked. "Dora is looking forward to you being there."

I nodded. "I wouldn't miss it," I replied, eyeing the box up. "What's this?"

Remus opened the cardboard flap and extracted a yearbook as well. "Your father said you've been looking through these things," he said, opening the book up and thumbing through the pages. "I thought you'd like to see some more, back from my days."

"Thanks," I replied, eager to search through the new material.

"Hmm," he muttered, frowning. "That's odd." He placed the book down and grabbed another one from the box. When he was done scanning that one, he smiled. "This isn't my box," he replied.

I opened the book he had set on the bed and turned to the first page reserved for messages. They were all addressed to James Potter. "Harry's dad?" I exclaimed. "Why do you have them?"

"After James and Lily passed, I stored some of their belongings at my house until the Ministry decided what to do with them," Remus answered. "I must have forgotten this box."

I found a photograph of James. I smirked at how handsome he looked. Forgetting about our break-up for a second, I asked, "Can I show Harry this when he gets here?"

Remus nodded. "Be my guest," Remus said. "In fact, why don't you tell Harry that as soon as he's 17, he has access to his second family vault?"

"Second?" I questioned.

"That's where the Ministry stored everything," Remus said, looking at his watch. He patted me on the shoulder and said that he had to leave.

I said farewell and immediately started scanning through all the books, hoping to find something of importance. I soon lost myself in the faces of people I knew and recognized. In James' seventh year, I opened to the last page and found a message from Lily. It had been the first one in all of James's yearbooks that she had signed.

James Peverell Potter

When I first saw you, I thought you were an arrogant, egotistical, narcissistic show-off. As the years followed, you never once failed to support that idea. The more I got to know you, the more you proved me right.

Then there was this year. When I was told you were going to be Head Boy and we were going to be working so close together, I almost told Dumbledore that I couldn't be Head Girl. I was sure that this was going to be the worst experience of my life.

For the first time in my life, you proved me wrong. You had changed. You were still arrogant, egotistical, and narcissistic. And you never tried to hide that you were showing off. But it was different. You were different. You were always sure of how you felt towards me but it took me longer to realize.

I love you, James Potter, and I'm glad you never gave up on me.

*Yours
Lily Autumn Evans*

Forever,

I closed the book. Harry had told me how his mother had seemingly despised his father for most of their school years together. It was heart-warming to make his stories become real. I placed the book back inside the box, noting that I'd have to show Harry later.

Hermione arrived the following Monday. She wasted no time informing us what she had done for her parents and where they were

soon going to move. She had said all this with barely a tear in her eye, but she wasn't fooling anyone.

Ron placed an arm around her. It was nice to see that they were beginning to work things out, but I felt a sudden stab of loneliness. I put my eyes to the floor and heard Hermione ask Ron if he could fetch some snacks for her. Ron happily obliged.

"I'm fine," I said to Hermione as soon as Ron left the room, knowing that she had sent my brother away to ask if I was coping all right. Before she could ask anymore, I said, "I tried to do some research, Hermione, but I couldn't find out who R.A.B. is for you."

Hermione simply stared at me and shook her head. "You shouldn't know those initials," she said. "You shouldn't know anything. They will torture you to find out where we're doing."

"What *are* you going to be doing?" I asked curiously.

Hermione frowned at me and shook her head more viciously. "If Harry wants you to know, that's a different story, but it's his decision, not mine." She stood up and muttered incoherently under her breath.

Was she right? Was that why Harry wasn't telling me? Snape or Draco would have told Voldemort already that I was Harry's girlfriend and they all would assume that I knew what he was doing. Would I be able to hold out under the torture curse? Would I be able to shield my mind? I shuddered even thinking about it.

Remus and Tonks's wedding was a small ceremony. The only decoration was the archway they were being married beneath. Before the procession had begun, I had been introduced to Ted and Andromeda, both whom I instantly liked.

"Do you, Nymphadora Tonks..."

I glanced around the yard. Very few people were there. Ted and Andromeda sat in the front row. Mad-Eye was sitting there along with a handful of other Order members that I barely knew. Out of my family, Mum, Ron, and the twins were the only other Weasleys besides me in attendance. And Hermione was seated to my right.

“And do you, Remus Lupin...”

My mind drifted dangerously to Harry. He would have loved to have been here, watching his former teacher and his favorite Auror tie the knot. And Dumbledore, he would have rejoiced that there was a bit more love in the world. Unfortunately, it was still unsafe for Harry to leave his house because the Order was still in the process of planning his escape... and Dumbledore... well...

“Then I declare you bonded for life. You may kiss...” But Tonks and Lupin had already begun kissing. *“Oh, well, I see you don’t need my permission...”*

When I could, I hugged each of them in a congratulatory embrace. “Tonks,” I said, “I’m disappointed in myself for completely missing this.” I motioned my hand back and forth between the newly married couple. “I mean, when you first met each other, I saw the attraction, but then...”

“Ginny,” she scolded, “you were caught up in your own romantic adventures, if my information from Molly is right.”

My insides twisted and begged for a change of subject. I had not yet spread the news of my break-up with Harry. I figured I shouldn’t expect to dodge these awkward revelations. “Harry and I broke up,” I admitted.

Tonks, who had looked joyous seconds earlier, quickly dropped her smile and replaced it with a frown. She placed a hand on my shoulder and looked compassionately at me. “I’m sorry, honey. Are you alright?”

“It was mutual,” I lied. What was I really supposed to say to Harry? *I’m sorry. You might be breaking up with me, but I’m not breaking up with you.*

“I don’t believe you,” said Lupin, who had obviously been listening in. “You know why he’s doing this, don’t you? He thinks it’s his fault that Dumbledore died and he doesn’t want the same thing to happen to you. He thinks he’s protecting you.” I didn’t respond as he slipped his

hand into Tonks's waiting hand. "Remind you of anyone else we know?"

Kissing her husband, Tonks replied, "I wore you down."

Lupin nodded, and addressed me again. "He'll come to his senses."

As much as I wanted to believe it, as much as I desperately clung to the idea, I knew this wasn't about coming to his senses. The only thing that made sense to Harry right now was killing Voldemort. Once that happened, he truly would be free.

Harry's seventeenth birthday was still ten days away, the day he would be back in my life and the day was unavoidably susceptible to attack.

Mum, Hermione, and I sat together in the kitchen. Mum and Hermione were once again discussing the Trio's early departure from school. I listened intently, hoping Hermione might slip up and mention something new, but she was good.

I turned to our clock in the kitchen. Every one of our hands was pointed to mortal peril and I wished that Hermione and Harry had a place up there. We might be able to keep a better eye on them when they were away. After all, we considered them family. I saw Dad's hand change to traveling and a few seconds later, he walked into the room, looking distressed.

Mum turned to him and saw what I saw. His face was painted with dread. Although he always looked worried nowadays, this was a new kind of concern.

"Arthur," Mum said, "what's wrong? What's happened?"

"Thicknesse," Dad replied. I recognized the last name of the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. "We think they've got to him."

Mum shook her head. "How long before...?" She stopped and looked at Hermione and me, refusing to ask such questions in front of us.

Dad was a step ahead of her. "They've got to know, Molly," he said and she reluctantly agreed. "We aren't sure how long until they have complete control but it's certain that as soon as the Ministry is theirs, so is Hogwarts."

Mum stood up fast, her chair falling to the floor in a clatter. "Then it's settled," she shouted and looking at me. "Ginny, you are not going back this year."

I was baffled that Mum would suggest such a thing when she had been advocating for the Trio to return to school. I didn't know how to feel about this. If Voldemort's hand really did stretch to the school, I wasn't sure if I wanted to be there.

"No, Molly," Dad said, picking her chair up from the floor. He placed his hands on her shoulders and lowered her to the seat. "It would draw far too much attention not to have two of our children returning. I've spoken to Minerva and the other teachers and they will all be returning, even if it is just to protect the children. I honestly think she'll be safer there for now."

Mum looked livid at first, but calmed slightly as she let Dad's words sink in. She sat there, arms crossed in front of her chest, and said, "I don't like it, but you're right."

"What about Harry?" Hermione piped up and I looked at her curiously. "If they've got Thicknesse, they'll have no problem getting to Harry, right?"

Dad nodded. "As soon as Harry turns seventeen, they'll be in there faster than we can imagine. To put it short, Thicknesse has made it illegal to connect that house to the Floo network, put a Portkey anywhere near the place, and to Apparate in or out. He says he's preventing Voldemort from getting in."

"I thought Harry's Mum did that for him," I said.

"That's not what they're trying to do," Hermione stated. "They're just trying to keep him in there, aren't they?"

“Couldn’t be righter,” Dad said. “Which means that sending Mad-Eye alone is out of the question.”

“Then how are we getting him here, Arthur?” Mum asked.

“Mundungus did have an idea,” Dad replied. “A risky one, but everyone seemed to agree that it was a smart one, though he didn’t look too keen on actually participating in the plan himself.”

“I’ll help,” I said quickly without even thinking twice about it. Mum almost killed me with her best dagger-like stare. “What? I’m much more reliable than that lousy thief.”

“As true as that may be, Ginny, I can not allow you,” Dad said, his eyes meeting mine with heaviness. “Not this time, not this plan.”

Mum looked towards Dad with eyes full of questions. “What exactly *is* the plan?”

Hesitantly, Dad explained the details... the Polyjuice Potion, the false trail, the safe-houses and their protective wards, the Portkeys, and Mum and me staying behind, waiting for our warriors to return to the Burrow.

Hermione shook her head. “He won’t let you all risk your lives like that for him,” she said.

I agreed, adding, “Not after what happened with Dumbledore.” I figured Harry wouldn’t be given much a choice in the matter, not with so many there to force him.

Mum and Dad left the kitchen to discuss the upcoming events in more detail, allowing Hermione and me to silently think about the impending plan. *Seven Harry Potters*, I thought and then smiled. *I don’t suppose I’d mind...*

“It’s getting closer, you know,” Hermione said, breaking my thought process. “Have you decided what you’re going to do about Harry?”

She knew me all too well. For the past several weeks, I had been running every scenario through my head, asking him to stay, begging

him to take me with him, merely wishing him luck, but nothing seemed satisfactory.

Then there was the whole issue of how to treat him. Now that I had a taste of what it was like to be Harry's girlfriend, I wasn't sure how else to act around him. I couldn't very well do what I wanted to do with him and I couldn't just ignore him completely. Where was the happy medium?

"Maybe it's back to putting my elbow in butter dishes around him," I answered jokingly.

Hermione grinned, remembering the story fondly. "You've got to talk to him before we leave," she said.

"I know," I replied, dreading *and* looking forward to the moment at the same time. I wanted to be everything I could for him, whether that meant being his girl while he was away or simply waiting.

"What are you getting him for his birthday?"

I froze. *That* hadn't even crossed my mind. I groaned loudly and said, "Thanks, Hermione. One more thing to worry about." I absentmindedly played with a strand of my hair and I asked Hermione how long I'd have before they left.

"I can only guarantee until the wedding," she answered. "After that, it's up to Harry... what we're doing, where we're going, all that."

I had been helping her pack a few items for the past several days, but I was sure there were more things that needed placed in her bag that I couldn't see. "Are you finished packing yet?" I asked.

"Not even close," she replied. "You helped me with the tent and the money, but I need to figure out which books I'm taking and what clothes are staying or going with us. Besides, there's all those protective spells to ward off intruders, although I am certain I don't need to know anymore. I'm still trying to learn how to make my Patronus talk..."

"You haven't mastered that yet?" I asked in disbelief. That was one of the first things she had attempted when she stepped foot in this house and had free time. Our Hermione was having difficulty with a spell?

"It's far more complicated than it looks," she said, obviously annoyed that she hadn't gotten the hang of it yet. Her left eye twitched at the thought. Suddenly, perhaps more to change the subject than anything, she pulled her bag from beneath her chair and placed it on the table. "You remember what your Dad just said about Hogwarts?"

"The part about it belonging to Voldemort?" I asked, eyeing the bag as she untied the drawstring. "How could I forget?"

She pushed her hand far into the depths of the bag, reaching further in than it would normally allow a person. I had assisted her with that spell four days ago and I was pleased to see it was working. She rummaged through it, saying, "I brought them all with me because I didn't know if we'd need them, but I think that you could use them." She pulled out several Galleons and dropped them in my cupped hands.

Insulted, I replied flatly, "I don't want your money." I let the coins fall to the table in loud clanking noises.

"I'm disappointed that you don't recognize these," she said.

Looking at the last coin that stopped moving, it suddenly dawned on me. These were the communication coins we used for Dumbledore's Army. Picking up one and staring at it between my fingers, I asked, "Do you really think we'll need to start the DA again?"

She shrugged. "Do I really think I'll need 100 pounds in Muggle money?" she questioned, shaking her head. "No, but it doesn't hurt to be prepared."

She took her own coin from her pocket and showed me how the Master coin worked the other coins. "I suspect only a few of the DA members will still have their coins," she said, "but that's fine. I had these extras."

"Thanks," I said, hoping that I would never have to use them. I pressed a couple of the serial numbers and felt my coin grow hot and wondered if the members of the DA around the country had felt their coin grow warm as well. I wondered if they were confused to see that it was active yet again. I wondered, most importantly, if they would think to bring it with them when they packed for Hogwarts.

Days later, I paced back and forth, holding the oil can that had appeared in our front yard only a minute prior. I could still feel the magical residue that had brought it there but failed to bring Ron and Tonks. Mum said not to worry, but I couldn't help it, and I could tell she couldn't either.

When the sneaker appeared next without Fred or Dad, I looked at Mum pleadingly, silently begging her to do or say something, but I knew she was as helpless as I was.

Four of them hadn't been able to return and I trembled as I sat down, holding the sneaker tightly against my chest. Something had gone wrong. Had my family, friends, and mentors been compromised? Were they all caught, taken captive, and being tortured right now? Were they dead? Was... was Harry dead? *No*, I said to myself. *I would know... I would have felt it...*

"Harry and Hagrid are next," Mum said quietly.

No sooner had Mum uttered the words, a blue light appeared in the sky, coming towards us fast. I recognized the light as a Portkey. *Please please please*, I repeated in my head towards nobody in particular.

Hagrid and Harry fell to the ground. Harry stumbled to his knees. He looked so weak, but it was Hagrid who had fallen completely to the ground, groaning in pain. I screamed in worry, threw the sneaker into the grass, and joined Mum as we helped the half-giant up to his feet, though I doubt we aided him much at all.

Mum turned to Harry. "Harry? You are the real Harry? What happened? Where are the others?" Mum cried, the agony of ignorance spilling from her voice.

“What d’you mean? Isn’t anyone else back?” Harry panted, the look of full responsibility on his shoulders. Mum didn’t need to answer with words. Harry started in a sputter, explaining what had occurred, trying to make her understand that he was sorry and didn’t know what had happened to her sons and husband.

Mum shut him up with a tight embrace. “Thank goodness you’re all right,” she whispered. After Hagrid asked for brandy, she rushed into the house, trying to hide the tears that were already forming.

The tightness in my chest grew stronger as I thought about the ambush. I had to be strong for now, for myself, for Harry. I met his eyes for the first time in over a month and he silently begged me for answers. I had become quite talented at reading his facial expressions.

“Ron and Tonks should have been back first,” I said, telling him about the Portkeys and who had missed them so far. “If they made it,” I continued, “George and Lupin ought to be back in about a minute.”

When they appeared, the tightness in my chest clenched even tighter. George was... *was he dead...*? There was so much blood on his head and shirt. I couldn’t lose George, not so close to having lost Dumbledore. My heart couldn’t take another blow like that.

I cradled my brother’s head in my arms as Mum wiped the crimson away from the side of his face. Where an ear was supposed to be there was only a scarlet hole. He was breathing, I could feel his shallow breaths against my arms, but he had lost so much blood.

Mum waved her wand several times over the wound but nothing was happening. The hole refused to rapidly grow shut and the ear was not being replaced. Mum’s wand hand quivered as she despairingly flicked it around his head.

“Wake up, George,” I whispered into his ear, stroking the dry side of his red hair. “You’ve got to wake up. Fred will be here soon. He’ll want to hear you laugh.”

"I can't..." Mum muttered. She was on her knees beside the couch and she placed her wand on the floor. "It's been cut off by dark magic... I can't..."

George was going to live his life without an ear. I can only imagine what kind of replacements Fred and George would invent to make up for his lack of one. I suppose it could have been worse, I decided. After all, he could have...

I stopped, listening. I heard voices from the yard, new voices. Someone else had come back. I breathed a sigh of relief and looked back at Mum, who had picked her wand back up and began to work fruitlessly again.

After several moments, she stood up and said, "I've stopped the bleeding." She took my hand and asked me to let George rest. "Clean yourself off, too, Ginny. You look a fright."

Not worrying about underage magic, I pointed my wand at George's blood upon my clothing and muttered, "*Scourgify*." The drying liquid was siphoned from the fabric and into my wand. I summoned a washcloth from the kitchen and wet it, wiping George's head and trying to cool him while Mum cleaned his wound.

"How is he?" Harry asked from the door and Mum explained. Harry's look of worry lessened and said, "Thank God."

"Did I hear someone else in the yard?" I asked and when he answered that it was Hermione and Kingsley, I felt the tightness lessen again. "Thank goodness," I breathed a sigh of relief. And I looked at Harry, so troubled and so bothered, and I wanted desperately to be in his arms and to tell him that everything was fine. No one dead, no one seriously injured... just an ear, Harry, it could have been worse...

His muscles flinched a fraction, but I recognized the gesture from all last year. He had wanted to touch me, any part of me, to feel alive and real again. Before he could give into the urge, there was a great uproar from the kitchen and that's when we knew Dad and Fred were home.

The tightness in my chest again decreased as I listened to George's voice, weak and weary, but cracking jokes at his predicament. I knew everything was going to be okay. I knew that my last two brothers were going to return home and we were going to be a family again, whole and untouched except for a missing appendage.

Harry motioned for me to follow him. I swallowed hard, noticing the terror in his eyes. He hated being the reason for our pain. Without thinking or planning, I took Harry's hand and held it tight. As I expected, he didn't pull away. He entwined his fingers around mine, the same as he had done during our Hogwarts romance, and his body relaxed. It should have been no surprise that I had this effect on him.

Hermione glanced down at our hands but she didn't say anything nor did she react at all. If it pleased her, it didn't matter. She turned her face towards the sky and waited, her hand nervously twitching by her side, waiting to be held by the one person who hadn't returned yet.

Still clutching each other's hand for dear life, Harry and I scanned the tree line for any sign. They all should have been back by now. They all should have returned.

When Ron and Tonks finally arrived, I ran into the house and gathered my parents up. By the time we reached the outside again, they barely had a moment of welcome when Bill and Fleur at last were spotted.

"Mad-Eye's dead," Bill said with no welcome, no warning.

His words echoed in my mind before I fully processed them. *Mad-Eye's dead...* I felt a slap of sadness against my already aching heart. I hadn't been close to Moody as I had been to Dumbledore so the feeling wasn't the same, but it still hurt nevertheless.

It was difficult to fathom. Out of everyone that had gone tonight, I expected Mad-Eye to live. His perpetual talk of constant vigilance set him apart from the rest of us, his always-on-guard attitude should have saved him... but Death plays no favorites, but I can guarantee that she holds grudges. Mad-Eye had escaped her seedy grasp far

too many times over the years... and it was that miserable little thief Mundungus's fault... Death had used the thief to collect her bounty...

I knew he couldn't be trusted.

Harry wanted to leave, to protect us all, and to stop Voldemort from finding us. As much as I didn't understand it, he would never accept that it's not just his war to win, that others are fighting, too. Everyone here would brawl to the death to stop what was coming, even if we had never heard of the famous Harry Potter.

After several comments about his wand, Harry wandered outside. He had claimed his wand had acted on its own accord but no one had ever heard of that before. While no one else believed him, I did. When it came to Harry, there were so many things that happened which no one could ever imagine.

I stopped myself when I took a step to join him outside. I looked at Hermione and jerked my head towards the door. She nodded, grabbed Ron's hand, and led him outside. I sat back down, thankful that it was with a family I hadn't lost. The tightness in my chest, except for the part reserved for Harry, had slowly diminished.

The following days, Mum barely left any free time for anyone. With the pretense of wedding chores, the Trio was unable to be in the same place at the same time for more than a few minutes, leaving them absolutely no time to plan their departure. Mum wasn't dumb; she knew what she was doing. As much as I hated to admit it, I was almost thankful that she was trying to keep them home.

On the second day of Harry's arrival, Mum assigned Hermione and me to change all the sheets in the house. This was a daunting task since the amount of beds practically doubled since the Delacours would be arriving.

I took one corner of the sheet and Hermione took the other. Together we pulled the fabric off the bed and let it fall to the floor. Hermione had been distracted today and I had a feeling I knew what it was about.

“Feeling guilty?” I asked her, knowing it had only been several hours since she swiped the Polyjuice Potion from Mad-Eye’s stock.

She nodded and picked up the clean sheet from the chair we had placed it upon. She unfolded it slowly and said, “I hate doing it under your Mum’s nose.”

“If Mad-Eye had a choice, I’m sure he’d want it to be put to good use before it spoils,” I answered, grabbing the other corner of the sheet that Hermione gave me and holding it.

“There’s no turning back now,” Hermione muttered.

She and I positioned the sheet on the upper portion of the bed and tucked it beneath the mattress. We repeated this action for the lower section of the bed. Standing there, looking at our handiwork, Hermione sighed. “I nicked something else from Mad-Eye,” she said softly. “We already have one, but I figured you could use it.”

Before I could respond, she led me over to my room and opened her bag. She pulled the case of Polyjuice Potion out and placed it on the floor. Rummaging again, she lifted a silvery cloth from the annals of the bag. She handed the smooth fabric to me.

“Moody’s Invisibility Cloak?” I breathed, not feeling worthy of having it. “I can’t take this. You take it.” I pushed the Cloak back into her hands and she refused to touch it again.

“No,” Hermione said firmly.

I grasped the silky material in one hand and ran my other hand through it. “It doesn’t feel like Harry’s,” I said, examining the Cloak. “This one doesn’t feel as light.”

“I noticed the same thing,” Hermione replied. “I asked Mad-Eye about them once while he was updating the charms on this one. He said it was made from the hair of a Demiguise. “

“Has Harry ever updated the charms on his Cloak?” I asked curiously.

Hermione furrowed her brow and thought about it. "Strangely, I don't think he has. That's rather odd, seeing that cloaks like these gradually fade."

I wrapped the Cloak around me and watched as my body faded from visibility. I grinned, remembering fondly of all the times in Hogwarts in which Harry had hidden us beneath its concealment. "Do you really think I'll need this?" I questioned.

"Never can be too prepared," Hermione replied.

"Since you lot aren't coming back and you think I'll need all these things," I said, thinking of one object that would be very useful for us, "do you think you could convince Harry to give me the Marauder's Map?"

"No," she answered. "You can ask him."

"Hermione! Ginny!" came the voice of my mother from downstairs.

Hermione motioned for me to follow as she left the room. I quickly stored the Cloak in the same place that I had stored the Galleons. Closing the trunk, I rushed to catch up with her.

The following day, Hermione and I had once again been assigned to change the sheets. Grinning at her knowingly, I took Hermione by the hand off to the side of the house and said, "I'll cover for you. Get out of here. Go talk to the boys."

Hermione stared at me curiously. "You're helping us? After what Harry said to you earlier, I didn't think you'd offer your assistance."

My mind thought back a few hours, when Harry and I had been setting the table for dinner. He had almost let slip the details of his journey, stating that he had to kill Voldemort. I knew this already, but to hear it spoken aloud was heart-breaking. If we hadn't been interrupted, I think he would have spoken to me.

I shook the memory from my head. "You're leaving and I can't stop that," I said, my voice barely quivering. "If helping you keeps you all

alive, then I'll do what I have to do." I motioned for her to leave. "I'll take care of Mum."

After a swift embrace, Hermione entered the back door. I watched Dad lead Harry into the chicken coop, where he was keeping the parts of Sirius's motorcycle, and I knew I'd have to act fast. I ran towards Mum and found her chasing a gnome around the garden.

"Ginny, give me a hand, please," she requested.

"I think I saw Harry, Ron, and Hermione walking towards the stream," I lied, knowing that the stream was a good walk away and it would take her some time to return, especially if she was searching. She immediately strolled towards the destination just as Harry exited the chicken coop, walked to the Burrow, and entered the door.

Staring at the entrance, I knew what I was about to do. I shouldn't feel guilty about it, since Harry and Ron always eavesdropped to find out information. If they caught me, they had no right to be mad. It's not like I was going to spread the information. I just wanted to know. I had a *right* to know.

I feared that Hermione might have used the *Muffliato* charm but when I heard the voices from the stairs, I knew I was in luck. Approaching the door, I leaned against it to listen in the best I could.

"...but you know what he'd say to us if he was here?" Ron voice said.

"C-constant vigilance," Hermione's voice said. She must have been crying.

They had been talking about Moody. Hopefully, I hadn't missed anything important. After all, they had only been in there for no more than four minutes before I arrived. They went on to insult Mundungus and then started talking about the books that Hermione had obviously been searching through.

"Just trying to decide which ones to take with us when we're looking for the Horcruxes," she said.

I flinched... *Horcruxes*... plural... more than one... Whatever the mystery word meant, I hadn't known there were multiple ones. I listened closely for more information.

I half-grinned when Harry tried to convince Ron and Hermione not to come with him. Hermione and I both had been expecting this. Hermione went into a long explanation as to why they knew exactly what they were getting themselves into. After Hermione explained, she asked Ron to show Harry the ghoul.

I swore, wishing I had grabbed my Cloak from my room. I wouldn't have had to move as they exited the room to ascend into the attic. Although, after our time together, I knew that Harry could sense me beneath his Cloak. I slipped out of sight and waited until I heard them return to the room.

They spoke for awhile about the plans with the ghoul and I listened, bored since I already knew this part of the arrangement. There was silence in the room when Ron was done speaking.

"GINNY!" From four floors below, I heard the shouts of my mother returning from my deception. I swore under my breath again. I hadn't heard anything new yet except that there were more than one Horcrux. I dared not leave now, not while they were alone for the first time since Harry's arrival.

"I know you said you wanted to go to Godric's Hollow first, Harry," Hermione said. "And I understand why, but... well... shouldn't we make the Horcruxes our priority?"

New information at last. That was one of the places they were going, the place where Harry was born and lived for a year, the place where his parents and Voldemort fell in the same night, and the place where James and Lily rested beneath the earth.

Next, they discussed R.A.B. but no new information was revealed there, despite that they'd have to find the real Horcrux and make sure he had destroyed it. Hermione next revealed that she had acquired several books about Horcruxes.

I heard Mum coming up the stairs. Fighting every urge to keep listening, I left the door and met Mum one floor below, out of breath. I smiled at her, hoping she wouldn't catch on to what I was up to.

"I didn't find them at the stream," Mum said. "Are you sure you saw them?"

"They came back," I said quickly. "I saw them from my window. I think they have gone around the other side of the house."

Mum's eyes refocused from me to the stairs I stood on. "Why are you out of breath?" she asked.

I hoped she would remain where she stood. "Chased a gnome up here," I replied. "He got in from the garden. You better hurry though," I said, pointing down the stairwell. "I think I heard Ron say they're leaving right after the wedding."

Mum turned on her heels and bounded down the stairwell as fast as she could. Relieved, I hurried up the steps as quietly as I could and positioned myself in the same place I had earlier, just in time to catch the end of one of Hermione's explanations.

"...from all that I've read, what Harry did to Riddle's diary was one of the few really foolproof ways of destroying a Horcrux."

I suddenly felt very sick. Whatever they were hunting, whatever these Horcruxes proved to be, I had been in possession of one for a full school year. I held it, cradled it, wrote to it... I had revealed to Riddle my most guarded secrets. Would the same thing happen to Harry and Ron and Hermione? Would they become possessed?

The diary and the locket were both Horcruxes but I was still no closer to figuring out what a Horcrux was. There seemed to be no connection between the two, no noticeable pattern that I could figure out. And all they were talking about was how to destroy it with basilisk venom or...

I heard Mum coming up the stairs and I gritted my teeth. I was sure I was about to find out exactly how I had been bewitched by Voldemort and I felt I was privileged enough to know. With every ounce of

willpower, I forced myself from the door again and met Mum just as she entered the bottom portion of the stairwell.

She looked at me and I could tell that she had finally figured out what was going on. "Ginevra Molly Weasley, what do you think you're doing?"

"I haven't caught that gnome yet..."

"Oh really?" she hissed, her hands on her hips. "I couldn't find them at the stream and I couldn't find them anywhere outside and they aren't anywhere *in* the house that I've looked. The only place I haven't looked..." She pointed up the stairs. "Now move, Ginny."

"Mum, please..."

"Get to your room," she said. Her words were final and I knew that I had bought all the time I could possibly buy for the Trio. Defeated, I hung my head and descended the stairs. When I entered my room, I felt the house-shaking slam of the bedroom door opening.

"You owe me," I whispered to Hermione later that night in my room. She agreed and I decided that the next day would be when I'd call in that favor. "I need you to distract Ron tomorrow for me. I'm going to talk to Harry."

Sitting in my room the next day, I gripped the yearbook in my hands. I nervously sat on the bed and thumbed through it. I planned to show Harry the message his mother wrote and then talk to him. I thought he would appreciate a conversation with me more than he would like receiving an actual physical object. It would be an appropriate birthday gift for him. Plus, you know, it was good for me, too.

I heard them ascending the stairwell and I jumped from the bed, throwing the book upon the pillows. I opened the door and called, "Harry, will you come in here a moment?"

I watched Hermione pull a reluctant Ron up the stairs. I turned into my room without actually seeing him follow me, but I knew he would come. Butterflies danced in the pit of my stomach, noting that we had

never been in my room together, but then again, there were a lot of things we had never done together.

“Happy seventeenth,” I said after a deep breathe. He thanked me and commented on the view. It was a nice view, and I tried not to laugh at this ridiculous observation, but I continued without acknowledging the statement. We chatted for a few seconds about what I had planned to get him for his birthday and his usual modesty was heard. “So then I thought, I’d like you to have something to remember me by, you know, if you meet some veela when you’re off doing what you’re doing.”

My insides clenched as I thought about little Gabrielle hitting on Harry the day before. Though she was only eleven, she was part veela and was almost a perfect copy of her older sister. I didn’t know if they had their seduction powers at that age, but I wasn’t about to take any chances. I put her in her place.

“I think dating opportunities are going to be pretty thin on the ground, to be honest,” Harry said.

I had not realized how close I had come to Harry until I could smell his familiar scent. It teased my nostrils as I breathed him in. I recognized his touch as he placed his hands on my arms. “That’s the silver lining I’ve been looking for,” I whispered.

The month of separation, the weeks of longing, and the desire to be close for so long ripped away at the very moment that our lips touched. And I was kissing him harder and more passionately than I had ever kissed him or anyone before. It was a kiss of assurance to each other that we would wait. It was a kiss of promise that we would never love anyone else again. It was a kiss of goodbye, the proper farewell that we never officially had.

I never wanted to stop, not even for breath. If I passed out from this, it would be worth it. If we stopped, we would have to return to our miserable lives without each other. If we stopped, we would be accepting the fate and destiny that was approaching each of us fast. If we stopped, it would be over... no turning back, no second chances, just over.

But as quickly as the kiss had begun, it had to stop. Ron's unwelcome entrance broke us apart. I stumbled backwards, turning my back towards everyone and glaring out the window. I felt the tears building again and I refused to let Harry look at me like this.

"I'll see you later," he said.

And he was gone. And I knew he'd have to stay away from me because Ron would make him promise, because another session like that and he wouldn't be able to accomplish what he was ordained to do. That was our goodbye kiss, I decided. Finally, our goodbye kiss...

Goodbye, I thought and the weight of the word pressed down on me and I sank to my knees and began to weep. After several long minutes, I placed a hand on my bed, pulled myself up, and wiped the tears from my eyes.

How was I going to make it through this wedding without breaking down again? *The same you have managed for the last month. No crying, no thinking about it. Be strong.*

The feeling of loneliness only strengthened as the next day came and the wedding ceremony took place. I couldn't escape that kiss, the thought of the euphoria that it had given me, the maturity of it all, the way a woman would kiss the man she was in love with.

Standing beside Fleur, I imagined it was me as the center of attention in a white gown, marrying a man with deep green eyes, glasses, and raven-colored hair that hid the lightning bolt shaped scar that, for one day, no one would care about.

"How did the DA meeting go?" Luna asked me later as I approached her. "I was with Daddy when I got Harry's message. Was anybody able to make it?"

"DA meeting?" I repeated.

"I've had owls from Seamus, Lavender, Dean, and Neville," she said, listing off a handful of original DA members. "They assumed Harry was here and figured they couldn't send letters to him, so they sent them to me."

I understood what she was talking about at last. When Hermione had given me the coins, I had turned the Master coin on, inadvertently alerting everyone else's coins. I pictured my coin sitting on my trunk with the rest of the collection beneath my new Invisibility Cloak.

"Hermione and I were looking at them. Luna, I didn't mean to make everyone think we were having a meeting," I said.

"Oh," Luna said, disappointed. "I hoped we would restart Dumbledore's Army. It was loads of fun the first time and I learned a lot." She pulled the coin from her purse and held it up, the sun reflected off the gold. "Daddy said it won't be long before we'll all have to unite together. It's our destiny."

I contemplated her words. "Keep it with you, Luna. It doesn't hurt to be prepared."

She smiled, pleased with my revelation. "I spoke to Harry earlier," she said.

Fred and George had borrowed some hair from a red-headed village boy and Harry was disguised as our cousin. No one was supposed to know that he was here. I glanced towards him. Looking agitated, he was sitting with Krum, who had just pointed in my direction. Krum stood up and departed from the table, leaving a disgruntled looking Harry there.

Ripping myself from the distraction, I looked back at Luna. Keeping up with the subtle subterfuge, I remarked, "Harry isn't here."

"Oh yes," she replied. "He's going by Barney today. Is that why you aren't with him?"

"No," I said quietly. "We broke up."

"Another change?" she exclaimed. "I can't keep up with Barney today."

There came a tap on my shoulder and I turned from Luna's uncomfortable truths to find Lee Jordan in handsome-looking blue dress robes. It was rare to see my brothers' friend look so nice.

I greeted him with a smile. "Hey, Lee."

He held out his hand. "Care to dance, Ginny?"

I took his hand as a slow song came on. Whisking me onto the dance floor, he asked, "Why aren't you dancing with Harry?" Before I could respond, he continued, "And don't tell me he isn't here. Fred and George told me was disguised."

I sighed, looking towards the table where Harry had been sitting with Krum but neither of them were there any longer. He must have slipped into the crowd to wander aimlessly. Sighing again, I said, "Lee, we broke up."

Lee twirled me around slowly. "That still doesn't answer the question," he replied, "as to why you haven't asked him to dance. He hasn't taken his eyes off you all day long."

I felt my cheeks grow hot and answered, "Ron made him promise not to lead me on."

"Since when do you listen to Ron?" Lee asked. "Besides, you'd just be dancing. Doesn't mean you'd be snogging in front of everyone."

I grinned and thought, *I wouldn't be so sure of that*. If we started dancing, I doubt we would care who'd be watching. I, for one, know that I wouldn't be able to restrain myself. "I just want to be what he needs," I answered. "I refuse to be the one who keeps him from... who keeps him from..."

"Saving the world?" Lee finished for me. "He's not the only one trying to defeat You-Know-Who. We're all in this together."

He twirled me around for a second time before continuing. "I've watched you grow up, Gin, into this beautiful young lady. You have the twins wrapped around your finger. You can do things with a wand and a broom I didn't know were possible. And I've heard what you can do to Harry. You *are* what he needs. For that, I think you deserve a dance."

It had always been extremely easy to talk to Lee. He had such a way with words, probably the main reason he was the favorite Quidditch announcer for our school. "Thanks, Lee," I said.

"Before you leave, I wanted to talk to you about something." He reached into the pockets of his robes and pulled out his DA coin. "I know Hermione, Ron, and Harry are leaving. Do you know why this alerted me the other week?"

I explained to him what Hermione had said and how I had activated the coin. I added my conversation with Luna. "What do you think, Lee, do you think we'll need to restart it?"

He looked around to make sure that no one was listening and then in a hushed voice, he whispered, "It's a lot worse than most people know. The rumor circulating now is that the Carrows will be teaching at Hogwarts."

I gasped, recalling the horror stories of the Death Eaters. "How did you find this out?"

"You hang around the pubs long enough, people start talking," Lee replied. "My point is that I think it's a good idea to stand united this year, but be careful. This isn't Umbridge you'll be dealing with."

I thought about how Lee wouldn't be returning this year since he had graduated a year before. "What are you going to be doing while we're in school?"

"Fred and George had an idea," Lee said. "We would represent the DA outside the school. Since the *Daily Prophet* won't report anything worthwhile, we want to keep the public informed. We haven't worked out the details yet so it might take awhile, but we promise to keep you informed with *everything*, even if you are at school."

He let go of me as the music changed tempo. "I think it's time you look for another dance partner."

I nodded and drifted through the crowd, ready to find Harry and ask him to dance. As I saw Ron dancing with Hermione, I didn't care what

my brother thought today. I was entitled to at least that much attention.

Lights flashed as people took photos with loved ones. I wished Harry looked normal so we could pose and document our time together. That was another something we didn't have and something I could use during lonely nights this year. On second thought, it wouldn't look innocent if a Death Eater found me with it.

I found Harry speaking with Aunt Muriel and Doge. He exclaimed, "The Dumbledores lived in Godric's Hollow?" His face was unmistakably hurt by the revelation.

I was tempted to save Harry from the blatantly rude behavior of my relative but another argument behind me had started. I turned to see Viktor Krum with his wand pointed at none other than Xenophilius Lovegood. Several dancers backed away, creating a small circle around the pair of wizards.

"What is the meaning of this, young man?" Xenophilius demanded.

Krum's face contorted with anger. The mysterious symbol, which resembled an eye, around Xenophilius's neck magically levitated several inches in front of his chest. "How dare you come here wearing Grindelvald's sign," Krum growled.

Xenophilius grasped the symbol and lowered it to his neck and he laughed as if this was a joke someone was playing on him. "Dear boy, you have been misinformed," he said. "This is no sign of dark magic or wizards of any kind."

"Do not laugh," Krum commanded, his jaw clenched. "Grindelvald killed my grandfather and this was his symbol. I will show you what we do to those in my country who think it is a joke."

"I certainly take this seriously," Xenophilius explained. "This is the sign of the Deathly Hallows. Come sit with me and I will enlighten you."

Krum raised his wand but Fleur had entered the small circle. She placed her hand on Krum's extended arm and lowered it, whispering

something I couldn't hear into his ear. He scowled and placed his wand away, taking off through the crowd seconds later.

It was then that a flash of silver glided right past me and a lynx was perched directly in the middle of the dance floor. Emanating from the mouth of the Patronus, a feat that Hermione had yet to master, came the voice of Kingsley Shacklebolt.

"The Ministry has fallen. Scrimgeour is dead. They are coming."

Screams from every member of the party echoed as the music stopped abruptly. Panic and pandemonium ensued. I watched Xenophilius grab Luna and Disapparate from the dance floor and I realized that our protective wards had been broken. I regretted leaving my wand inside because I couldn't find a comfortable place to store it.

I fearfully searched the mob, screaming, "HARRY!" My eyes were full of fear as I repeated his name even louder. I took a step but tripped, tumbled to the floor, and tried to shield myself from oncoming feet. Before I could cover my head, something hard smashed into my temple violently and I blacked out.

"Don't lie to me! Travers saw your son Disapparate from the crowd!" said a voice that I didn't recognize.

"Did he have red hair?" Fred said. *"Freckles? Tall and lanky?"*

"Like all the Weasley relatives?" George said.

Why was it all black? My eyes were so heavy. I wished I could open them. I wished I could see what was happening.

"This is not a game!" the unknown voice said. *"It would be wise to treat this situation seriously."*

"Yaxley," said another unfamiliar voice, *"They're telling the truth. The boy is upstairs in his bed."*

The first voice I heard responded, meaning that he must be Yaxley. *"Are you sure it's him?"*

“If you’d like to take a closer look, Yaxley, be my guest, but I’m not willing to contaminate myself.”

I opened my eyes slowly and squinted. The light from the window shined directly onto my face. I tried to move but I was bound in sitting position. My head pounded as if I had been trampled upon, which most likely was the case.

“Any sign of Potter?” Yaxley asked another man.

That man shook his head. “We’ve searched every room. Nothing. He’s not here.”

“Where is Harry Potter?” Yaxley bent low to meet my father face to face.

“I don’t know,” Dad said. “I’ve already told you.”

“Convenient,” Yaxley replied. “It is well known that your son is good friends with the Potter boy. And rumor has it that your daughter,” he motioned towards me, “and him share a special relationship.” He turned from my father and met my gaze. “Ah, I see you have finally decided to join us.”

“Harry and I barely dated a month,” I said groggily, the pain in my head causing me to see spots. “We broke up. If you want information of where he is, I would be the last person you should ask.”

Yaxley’s mouth slowly formed a grin and he quickly pointed his wand at me. “*Crucio!*” he shouted before anyone had time to react.

I never felt such agony as the torture curse. The pain pulsed through every part of me, eating away at my muscles, locking my fingers and toes in place. Through the torment, I heard my brothers and father screaming obscenities.

When Yaxley pulled the curse off of me, he bent low like he had to my father and looked directly into my spinning eyes. “Let me repeat, child, where is Harry Potter?”

I met Dad's eye as Yaxley glanced to him and I moved my head a fraction to indicate not to reveal anything because of me. I could handle whatever this goon had.

"We don't know," Dad repeated.

"I want to hear it from *you!*" Yaxley sneered as he put the curse back on me, trying to break me, trying to make me talk.

I must have bit down hard on my tongue because I tasted blood and felt the hot liquid flowing on my chin, dripping from my face, and staining the new dress I was wearing. "I don't know," I mumbled.

"Where is HE!?" he screamed and repeated the actions.

"I DON'T KNOW!" I shrieked, my hair wild and my eyes crazed. "He broke my heart! He left me behind! Why the *HELL* would I know or care where he is?" My breathing came in heavy pants as my head and body thumped with pain. I'm sure I had a concussion.

Yaxley grinned, satisfied at my pain and torment. He motioned for the other members of the interrogation. "We're done here. If she knew, she'd crack. She doesn't know."

Mum tended to my wounds later, healing my skull and fixing my tongue. As she worked, I thought about what I had said to Yaxley under the influence of the Cruciatus Curse. Surely it had been a lie to protect Harry, but I couldn't shake the feeling of truth behind the words.

I definitely cared where he was. There was no doubt in my mind about that. I cared too much for my own good, but the feeling of resentment had surfaced unexpectedly. I was angry to have been left behind. I didn't even care that I was stuck in this house while he was out there gallivanting to rescue us all... he left me behind in *knowledge*... and all I ever wanted was to know what was going on with the man I loved.

Before I drifted to sleep and entered the nightmares that were sure to follow, I felt the overwhelming need to prove myself to Harry. I was no longer that fragile little girl he rescued from the Chamber.

The infiltration into our house had not been an isolated one. Every house around the country connected to the Order had been invaded and everyone there had been interrogated in similar ways. No Harry Potter had been found and luckily there had been no casualties beyond a few aching bodies.

The takeover had been fast and silent. It might have even been relatively unknown if Kingsley had been caught. He was fortunate to have escaped alive. Thicknesse was appointed as the Imperius-controlled, puppet minister and Yaxley had been promoted to Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

Several days after the attack on our family, I sat in the kitchen eating lunch and reading the *Quibbler* that Luna had dropped over earlier. The front page featured a frightened looking Harry and the headline: “BOY-WHO-LIVED HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH DUMBLEDORE’S MURDER.” Inside, Xenophilius retold Harry’s version of the Headmaster’s demise.

My family had been extremely busy these past couple days. Dad, who wanted to remain at the Ministry, had managed to keep his job. Bill and Fleur had gone on a very short honeymoon to Iceland. Mum and I were left to take care of the house. Charlie, the twins, and Lee had been assigned a special job. Since the Muggleborn Registration Act had been passed, Professor McGonagall had passed along a list of all the Muggleborn students to them. Their job was to find and transport them to safety.

Fred and George had strolled into the kitchen, looking satisfied. I placed my copy of the *Quibbler* onto the table and dropped my partially eaten sandwich on the plate.

“How did the mission go?” I asked, thinking about my friends that would have to go into hiding and couldn’t return to Hogwarts. Dean, Colin, Dennis, to name a few. “Where did you take them?”

“Wish we could tell you,” George answered. “Just know that everyone is perfectly safe as long as the Secret Keeper isn’t caught.”

“And he won’t be,” Fred continued. “We’ve forbidden him from leaving the house.”

"Who is the Secret Keeper?" I asked.

"Colin," they said together.

"*What?*" I cried. "He's underage like me! Why can't his parents do it?"

"It doesn't work with non-magical folk," Fred said.

"And it doesn't matter the age as long as no one gets to the Keeper," George replied. "And Mr. and Mrs. Creevey insisted, saying if they were going to run a safe house, they would be making the decisions."

"But..." I stammered, trying to find a reason for Colin not to do it, but none were coming. If it were me and I were given the choice, I would have done the same thing.

"When we got there, they were already harboring several Muggleborns from your year," Fred informed. "And seeing that it was too risky to use any houses used by the Order, the Creeveys were more than willing to offer their help."

"They have enough supplies to last three months," George said. "Once they need more, Colin will contact us." He held up his DA coin and smiled. "Dumbledore's Army back in action."

"Colin sends his apologies that he can't attend this year with you," Fred said, "but he asked you to give the Carrows hell for him."

I was impressed. Colin had come a long way from the hero-worshipping, annoying little boy. He was becoming a brave young man, displaying what it meant to be a true Gryffindor. It made me itch to be doing something, anything, for the Resistance

"What about Dean?" I asked, thinking of my ex-boyfriend.

"He wasn't there," Fred replied.

"His mum said he packed some things and ran," George said. "Smart kid, knew exactly what this Act meant for him. Wish he would have stuck around an extra day. We could have used his help."

"Did you find Delia?" I asked.

Fred and George nodded but didn't answer. I could tell by their lack of informing me that something bad had happened to my former roommate.

"But she hasn't used magic in over a year," I exclaimed. "She left the school. She wanted to go back to her normal life. Why did they go after her?"

Softly, Fred replied, "She may not have been in school for awhile, but I wouldn't be so sure about your other assumption."

"We found her," George said as delicately as he could, "with her wand right beside her."

"From all evidence, she put up a good fight," Fred explained. "There was a lot of blood, but it didn't belong to her or her family. I'd hate to be the Death Eater she cursed."

"She... she fought back?" I questioned.

"Looks like you rubbed off on her," George said, grasping my hand to comfort me.

I would never get used to the feeling of grief and I prayed silently that I never would. It might hurt to have emotions but that's what separated me from the scum that caused those emotions. An overwhelming desire to provide justice for my friend took control. Would this war ever end? Would Harry find a way?

I refused to cry, instead I let my insides take the brunt of the pain. "Have you found them?" I asked, knowing my brothers would understand who I meant.

"We didn't," Fred replied. "But Lupin just got back from Grimmauld Place and found them there."

"I thought it wasn't safe there," I said with surprise.

"There are Death Eaters waiting on the street," George explained. "Why Snape hasn't revealed the secret yet is beyond me."

"Maybe he's feeling guilty?" Fred suggested.

"That greasy git?" George said.

"No," I said. "Whatever it is, it's not remorse."

We stayed in silence for several minutes and I processed the information that had just been revealed to me. The war had started a long time ago but it was finally reaching into every aspect of my life.

Fred, without warning, waved his wand and a brightly wrapped box appeared on the table. The tag was marked with *Happy Birthday, Ginny. Love, Fred and George.*

"My birthday isn't until next week," I said although I hadn't expected anything from anyone. There were far too many things to worry about other than my birthday.

George pushed the gift into my waiting hands. "We wanted to give it to you early," he said.

"It's not a very personal gift," Fred explained, "but we thought you could use it for school."

I unwrapped the paper to reveal a hand-carved wooden chest. I lifted up the cedar lid. Inside were about a dozen handheld mirrors. I picked one up and curiously studied my reflection.

"We developed a line of these for a July release," George said. "They were supposed to be our big summer seller."

"For obvious reasons, dear sister, we have indefinitely closed the doors to pursue more heroic goals."

They each picked up a mirror of their own and chanted, "*Speculum!*"

"Hey, Fred!"

"Hey, George!"

With each statement, the mirrors had also proclaimed their words in unison. Fred handed his mirror and I saw the unmistakable image of George.

"Sorry, Ginny, I know I look a fright, but I haven't had time to tidy up in 'ear." George grinned, pressing a palm against the place where his ear should have been.

"Two-way mirrors," I whispered.

Fred and George each chanted, "*Finite Speculum*." The mirrors returned to their normal mode. They placed the objects into the chest with the remainder of them.

"Instructions are in the bottom," Fred said.

"Just in case?" I asked.

"No," George replied. "You will need this."

"Period," Fred finished.

As August faded into oblivion and the news was revealed that Severus Snape would be the new Headmaster, I knew that it didn't matter who I was or was not dating. As long as I stood against the most evil man in the Wizarding world and refused to respect Dumbledore's murderer, I would not be safe. Harry's desire for me to be protected was a reality that could not happen. We were both fools to think it would.

Stepping into King's Cross on the first of September, I noted that the crowd was not as thick as it usually was. The Muggleborns were not present, I noticed, and each Slytherin that walked by me had an arrogant look on their faces.

I joined Neville and Luna, not saying a word, but letting a silent understanding pass between the three of us. I palmed the DA coin in my hand, pressing the serial numbers to alert any member that still possessed their coin that we had reformed. Slipping the galleon back into my pocket, I knew where my place would be in the destiny that was approaching fast.

Chapter Fourteen: The Hogwarts Rebellion

Maybe it was the fact that I felt I had something to prove. Maybe it was the fact that all the teachers and parts of the castle made it their priority to keep us safe. Maybe it was the fact that Harry kept his eye on me via the map. Maybe it was the fact that Severus Snape was doing his best to protect us.

Whatever the reason, I never shook the feeling that someone was watching out for me.

When Neville, Luna, and I entered the train corridors, every member of Dumbledore's Army except for Zacharias Smith was present, although no one really cared that Smith had failed to come. Members were waiting in three compartments, divided up by house affiliations. We quickly discussed between the three of us what we were going to say and then each took a compartment.

I entered the Hufflepuff compartment where Hannah, Susan, and Ernie sat waiting for me. They each nervously looked up when I entered but quickly lost that facial expression when they realized it was me.

"I don't think we have to worry on the train," I said as I slid the door shut behind me. "But just in case..." I pulled my wand from my pocket and pointed it at the hallway, muttering the Muffliato spell to curtail eavesdroppers. Turning back to the trio of Hufflepuffs, I greeted each one with their name and a welcome.

"I alerted you," I informed, explaining to them what Hermione had said the night I had pressed the serial numbers. "We thought we might need to reform this year. Since Hermione is Muggleborn, she isn't allowed back. Since Harry is an Undesirable, that puts him out of the picture. Since Ron is sick, he can't make it. If you all are okay with it, Neville, Luna, and I will be replacing them as leaders."

"Led by Harry Potter's girlfriend?" Ernie asked, looking at his fellow house members. "I don't think there's a better replacement here." Hannah and Susan both agreed.

I averted my eyes and watched the scenery rush by the window. I hadn't expected to deal with the statement so soon. "We broke up," I said.

"What?" Hannah cried. "But do you know where he is? Is he off planning to overthrow You-Know-Who?"

I honestly had no idea where he was at that particular moment of time. "Whatever Harry is off doing, I don't know about it. He never told me anything." I said this all with only the slightest note of bitterness.

"Is he with Hermione?" Ernie asked.

"Hold up," Susan replied. "It can't be a coincidence that all three of them have suddenly disappeared. Ginny, what are they planning?"

"As far as we know," I said, pausing, indicating that she might be right, but it was unwise to say anything else, "and as far as any *Death Eaters* know, Ron is sick, Harry is on the run, and Hermione is in hiding."

They nodded, suddenly understanding the situation, maybe even piecing together why Harry had broken up with me. I looked across the corridor and watched Neville talking to his fellow Gryffindors. He looked different. He was acting like a real leader.

"The biggest issue," I started, turning back to my listeners, "is what we are going to do about Dumbledore's Army because this won't be Umbridge we'll be dealing with. It will be the Carrows and Snape, Death Eaters, and I'm sure they won't be as merciful as Umbridge was."

"She wasn't merciful," Ernie said, holding up his hand where fading words were etched.

"Compared to Carrows, she'll look like a pygmy puff," I said, recalling the stories and the information that the twins had passed on to me. "And then there's Snape. I don't think I have to remind you..." My mind flashed to my previous Headmaster broken on the ground. I shook the thoughts away.

"What are you doing, Ginny?" Hannah asked. "It sounds like you're trying to talk us out of staying with the DA."

I shook my head. "I'm just trying to make you understand," I answered. "This is going to be dangerous. This isn't like last time. This isn't a game. If you're going to be part of this, you might get hurt. If you're going to commit, don't do so lightly. I can't handle anyone dying."

They were quiet, letting the words take effect. After several silent seconds, Ernie spoke up. "Are you done?" he asked. "We know the risks, Ginny, and we're sticking with it." The other Hufflepuffs agreed.

It was settled then. These three could be depended on. I told them what was happening with the DA outside of the school. We discussed how it wouldn't be smart to have meetings every week but to meet only when completely necessary. We would communicate via the coins and word of mouth. Our first objective, we decided, was to take each of the new First Years under our wings.

Dumbledore's Army was back.

Sitting beside Neville at the Gryffindor table, I watched the First Years line up to be Sorted. The hat that was placed upon the stool became animated and sang out:

"One	thousand	years	have	passed
A	millennium		is	gone
The	four	founders	came	and
And	Hogwarts	School	was	born.
Good	Gryffindor	took	the	brave
Slytherin	wanted		the	best.
Sweet	Ravenclaw	took	the	wise
And	Hufflepuff		the	rest.
I	advise	you	here	and
That	the	Founders	had	it
Apart	you		surely	fall
But	together	you	are	strong.
Mysteries				unraveled
Secrets		are		revealed
Futures	are	on	the	rise

*Destinies are sealed.
But 'tis my duty to sort you out
So your fates are in my hands
And though I separate you now
United you must stand."*

An awkward silence followed the Sorting song. Snape's head was leaning against his hand, looking bored. The Carrows looked livid and I wouldn't have been surprised if they had tried to burn the hat right there.

Someone started to clap. I glanced towards the Ravenclaw table, expecting to see Luna making the noise. Instead Terry's hands were slamming together. Michael and Anthony joined him, followed by me, and then all of the DA. Soon every table minus the Slytherins were applauding.

McGonagall slightly smiled and called the first student. "Barton, Angerona!" She ushered the young girl onto the three-legged stool and placed the hat upon her head.

She sat there with a timid determination upon her face. After several seconds, the hat shouted, "Gryffindor!" Looking pleased with herself, she jumped from the stool and started running towards our table, forgetting that she still had the hat on. With a pink face, she ran back and handed the Sorting Hat to McGonagall. The crowd chuckled.

I motioned for the girl to sit beside me. With hesitation, she wedged herself between Neville and me, waiting eagerly to witness who else would be joining us.

One by one, the new students were Sorted. As each boy or girl walked to their respected tables, the DA members motioned for them to join us. The last student, Simon Samson, was Sorted into Ravenclaw and Michael offered him a seat.

Since the Sorting was finished, Snape stood up. The Slytherins immediately stood up and applauded the new Headmaster. Glaring intently in their direction, I noticed Draco was a few seconds shy of joining his fellow house mates in the standing ovation. No other table

stood. Snape's face twitched, perhaps to hide the obvious satisfaction, and he raised his hand to silence them.

"It is another year at Hogwarts," Snape said, his low voice echoing against the sky of the Great Hall. "Many changes have taken place in the short span of two months."

"Murderer!" Terry shouted and a gasp escaped everyone's mouths.

"One of them being that insubordination will not be tolerated so I urge you to sit down, Boot, or you will be introduced to our new Disciplinarians," Snape said coldly, his greasy locks swaying as he spoke.

A man and a woman, short and lumpy in appearance, stood to general silence.

"As well as their disciplining duties, Amycus and Alecko Carrow will be taking over the teaching positions as Defence Against the Dark Arts and Muggle Studies, respectively. You are obligated to take both classes this year."

Snape's eyes swept over the crowd and I imagined him picking the brain of each person, looking for weaknesses, searching for a way to exploit us. His eyes stopped on me for a brief second and then said, "You all know the rules. Make sure that I do not have to remind you."

Exiting the Great Hall later, I walked with Angerona and told her that her name was pretty. She straightened up and thanked me, but didn't meet my eye. "What's wrong?" I asked her.

"Mum told me not to trust anyone," Angerona said. I took a second to admire her smooth chestnut colored hair that was tied up, but surely reached to the small of her back when allowed to be freed. Her eyes matched her hair. Give her a couple years and she'd be stealing all the bloke's hearts.

"She's a smart one then," I replied, "but I promise you that I'm the sort of witch you can trust." I held my hand out. She took it hesitantly and shook it as I said, "My name is Ginny Weasley."

Her eyes grew big and she gasped. “*You’re* Ginny Weasley?” she exclaimed. “I should have known. Katie’s told me so much about you.”

“Katie Bell?”

“She’s my cousin,” Angerona said, her eyes finding my hair. “I was so nervous, I forgot who to look for. Katie said that if I found you, you’d look after me.”

I smiled, feeling good that Katie thought so highly of me. “She’s right,” I replied. “It’s a scary place this year and I’ll be glad to help.”

“Is it true?” she asked. “Are you... are you Harry Potter’s girlfriend?”

“I used to be,” I said, feeling my insides twist and turn. *But he’s off doing Merlin knows what and I’m here wondering if he’s dead...* “Come on, Ang, let me show you around Gryffindor.”

Boldly, I entered the Muggle Studies classroom the next day. I had just finished class with Alecto’s brother. Amycus had spoken fondly of the Dark Arts, explained that we would be learning many useful curses, and might even have a chance to practice them. I shuddered, imagining the scenarios.

Since Hermione had taken all the Horcrux books, I had considered meeting with the Death Eater after class to ask him about the evil objects. I desperately wanted to know what Harry was up against but I couldn’t jeopardize his mission. Even though the dark wizard didn’t look too smart, I couldn’t risk it.

I grabbed a seat near the front as the Slytherins strolled in, looking as if they owned the place. I glanced beside me where Colin would have sat if he were here. I missed him. I glanced over where Vaisey and Harper sat. I was not looking forward to Alecto Carrow’s daily lessons.

Alecto was waiting for us, her name printed neatly on the board. She wore long sleeve robes, hiding the foul Dark Mark that was on her arm. She smiled as she greeted the children of Death Eaters that she knew. She scowled at me. I scowled right back.

“Welcome to Muggle Studies,” she said as the last Sixth Year sat down. “Today you will not need to take notes. Today is just for listening. Lights!” She pointed her wand around the room. All torches were extinguished and the windows were blocked to stop all sunlight.

She strolled to the back of the room and tapped a projector with her wand, making the machine hum to life, throwing the first picture against the front of the classroom. It was Hogwarts, showing the outline of four people.

“In the year 990, four of the greatest witches and wizards of our time founded this great school of Hogwarts. Godric Gryffindor, though he meant well, allowed Muggleborns to come to the school and be taught. He also felt that coexisting with the Muggle population was the proper way to live. Salazar Slytherin disagreed with Godric and they went their separate ways.”

She tapped her wand again and the picture changed, revealing a portrait of the Slytherin founder. “Salazar felt it would be the downfall of our way of life to let Muggles in on our secrets. Was he right?”

A tap and the picture changed, revealing a person being burned at the stake. “In 1401, the Muggle government of England passed the first Witchcraft Act. Witches and wizards alike, thinking they would be safe if they hid their wands and magic, were captured and killed nevertheless.”

I raised my hand to protest. She shouted at me to ask no questions before she was finished.

Another picture sprang to life. Fire licked the woman and she shrieked. I turned my head to block out the sight, and Alecko continued, “Many of our kind were able to produce wandless magic and protect themselves, but many could not.”

The scream of the woman echoed against the walls as she changed the slide. I stared around the room at the bewildered faces of my classmates. The Slytherins stared intently at the new slide, flashing the number 60,000. This is certainly not what we had been expecting.

“In the span of 200 years, this is how many of our kind were killed in Europe.”

The slide changed again. Several men and women were hanging limply by their necks. I felt sick to my stomach.

“1692,” Alecto said. “Tituba, member of one of the first Wizarding families to travel to the New World, healed a minister’s daughter from a potentially fatal accident. The girl told her father and the Salem Witch Trials began. Tituba’s whole family was executed.”

I raised my hand to protest again but she ignored me.

Slowly, picture after picture flashed across the front, showing hangings, burnings, beheadings, and all forms of execution and torture. “The Spanish Inquisition, Basque Witch Trials, Wurzburg, Ramsele, North Berwick!” Alecto said, each of the words slowly escalating in volume.

“Our kind was forced into hiding by the narrow-minded Muggle superstitions,” Alecto said. “We, who were more powerful, were almost completely wiped out because of the ideals of Godric Gryffindor and those like him. We, who are more powerful, made to look weak by conceding to a lesser species.”

“But that’s not true,” I said out of turn. “*A History of Magic* says...”

Alecto pointed her wand at me and I stopped speaking. “Young lady,” she hissed, “of course you believe everything you’ve read. That’s filthy Godric Gryffindor’s propaganda. Always trying to defend the Muggles.”

I shook my head, figuring that I was debating a losing argument. “But this was a long time ago. The world has changed,” I said.

She tapped the projector and a colorful scene appeared on the wall. A little black girl smiled at the camera waving. “This little girl was killed seven months ago in Kenya,” Alecto said. “A few Muggles saw her performing unintentional magic.”

She moved to the front of the class, returning the light to the torches and opening the windows back up. She looked at Ethan Taylor. "You..." she pointed at him. "How has your life been affected by the Muggles?"

Ethan shrugged, but I could see the words were beginning to affect him. Slowly, he answered, "My grandmother tried to help a group of Muggles before I was born. They killed her... with... a gun... I think that's what they call them."

Harper spoke up. "My little brother tried to hex a group of Muggle boys of the playground last year for picking on him. The Ministry threatened to forbid him from coming to Hogwarts this year."

One by one, each Slytherin told a horror story involving the Muggles. I listened in shock, trying to comprehend what was going on. I watched many of the Gryffindors around me looking confused, as if everything that was being said was making sense.

"Do you have any stories about Muggles?" Alecko sneered, coming close to my desk and I shook my head. "You are a Pureblood. Surely you have some strong feelings about the Muggles stealing our magic."

"I do have strong feelings," I replied. "My best friend is a Muggleborn. She's the most talented witch I know. I can't understand how she'd be able to *steal* those abilities."

Alecko nodded, seemingly prepared for my answer. If she had done her homework, she knew about me, about my family, and about our ideals. "Wait outside the class, Weasley."

Gathering my things, I gladly left. I was tired of all the lies and disgusting things she was saying. Exiting the door, I leaned against the wall and waited for the class to be over, thinking of everything I had just heard.

It was genius really, what they were doing. If they started subtly, they could guide us into the belief that Muggles were inferior and wouldn't need to force a prejudice upon us. It was brain-washing, giving the slightest bit of doubt of our ideals and beliefs and taking advantage of

it. I could already see the looks of consideration of a few of my classmates.

The class was let out later and when Ethan passed by me with a friend, I heard him say, "I hate to say it, but I think she makes sense." I wanted to follow him and talk some sense into him.

Before I had a chance to act, a hand was placed on my shoulder and I shuddered, looking back and finding the female Death Eater staring at me. "Follow me," she said.

She led the way through the corridors and to Snape's office. Ahead, I saw her brother already walking up the staircase into the headmaster's room and we caught up just before the door closed on us.

"In trouble already, Weasley?" Snape asked, his dark eyes brooding as he sat behind the desk he did not deserve. He did not rise to greet me.

I had no idea why I was here, but I felt the need to appeal to the portrait of Dumbledore. Scanning the long row of portraits, I found an empty one labeled with his name, but if he had ever been there, he was disappointingly absent now.

Alecto and Amycus took a seat on either side of me. I looked for a chair for myself but there was none. I was forced to stand.

"Why am I here?" I asked.

Snape said nothing, but motioned that one of the Carrows had the floor to speak. Amycus turned to me and said, "We want to know where Harry Potter is."

I grimaced, once again found in danger no matter if he was my boyfriend or not. I shook my head and said, "Why would I know?"

"Are you not Potter's girlfriend?" Alecto asked.

"I don't know where you are getting your information," I said, allowing my stare to meet Snape's eyes for a second. "But we broke up a long time ago. I've already had this discussion with Yaxley."

"You are lying!" Amycus shouted, pulling his wand from his robes and placing it upon my temple. "Perhaps you should start telling the truth."

I didn't flinch. I stared straight ahead at Snape, cursing him silently for all the pain he caused me. All of a sudden, I felt something lightly touching my mind, an invader, and quickly crossing my thoughts was the kiss Harry and I shared on his birthday. If Snape was using Legilimency on me, he would know that I wasn't being entirely truthful. I tried my best to imagine a brick wall, thinking of no other way to keep him out.

"There will be no need to torture her today," Snape said, the second thing he had said since I stepped into his office. "She's telling us the truth."

My eyes snapped towards the Headmaster but were distracted by the glint behind him. Stifling a gasp, I stared at the glass case. Encased in a clear box was the Sword of Gryffindor, the same sword Harry had killed the basilisk with, the same sword that Dumbledore had willed to Harry, and the same sword that the late Minister had refused to hand over.

Alecto made a noise of disapproval. "Severus, if we can use her..."

"Perhaps it is not my judgment you are questioning," Snape said. "If you doubt me, then you doubt the Dark Lord..."

But as I stared at the Sword, I stopped listening. I knew what we needed to do.

After the interrogation and close call in Snape's office, I met Neville and Luna back in the Gryffindor Common Room. Neville's cheek had a large gash in it and Luna was dapping medicine in the wound. Neville had stood up against Alecto in Muggle Studies, asking her how much Muggle blood she had.

Brilliant, I thought. *Foolhardy, but brilliant.*

“What did they want from you?” Luna asked me.

I explained what the Carrows had wanted. I told the story how Snape had claimed I was telling the truth. I grew excited as I reached the part I desperately wanted to tell them. “I saw the Sword of Gryffindor,” I said, my eyes flashing. “I think we found our first mission.”

“You want to steal the sword?” Neville said in disbelief. “It’s suicide.”

I held out my arms as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. “Dumbledore wanted Harry to have it,” I replied. “And we are his army. What better way to prove ourselves than to carry out Dumbledore’s wishes.”

“That’s a wonderful idea,” Luna said, “but how are we getting into Snape’s office?”

Neville looked in disbelief from Luna to me and back again. He shook his head and proclaimed, “We can’t...” he said, trying to find reasons. “It’s one thing to stand up to the Carrows. It’s one thing to refuse to hurt each other. But this...?”

“Maybe the sword can kill You-Know-Who,” Luna said. She slid her hand into Neville’s palm and squeezed. “You know we’re right, Neville.”

Whether the action was platonic or not, I suddenly felt very lonely, but it had a profound effect on the Gryffindor.

Neville closed his eyes and pondered. After several seconds, he reopened them. “Let’s take this one step at a time,” he said. “Let’s get the password and move from there. If we don’t get the password-”

“We’ll abandon,” I replied. But I wasn’t about to abandon this mission. If no one else would help, I would do it myself. I didn’t sleep that night, trying to come up with the best possible solution to acquire that password.

It was less than a week in and I had already decided that this place could be no better than what my brother, best friend, and love of my life were facing. So far, I had heard nothing about their whereabouts

since they were staying at Grimmauld Place. If that's all they were doing right now, hiding, and I was here putting up with Death Eaters, I would have some butts to kick later.

When Owl posts came that morning, I received a letter.

Dear Ginny.

We hope everything is fine. Have you heard about Honeydukes? Maybe you'll find out on the first Hogsmeade trip.

Love, Fred.

This is the type of note they promised to send if they had learned anything I should know about. They promised to mention the name of the place to meet them. If it was any indication, the twins would be meeting me in the secret passageway leading to Honeydukes as soon as lessons were over.

When classes were finished, I quickly slipped my Cloak on and proceeded towards the passageway I had used once with Harry. I chanted the appropriate incantation and tapped the witch in the right spot and the door opened. As quickly as I slipped in, the door shut behind me. I proceeded down the passageway until I saw the faint outline of my brothers standing there with their wands lit.

"Hello, boys," I said, pulling the Cloak off and revealing myself.

Startled, they had their wands pointed at me and George asked, "What did we give you for your birthday?"

"Two-way mirrors," I said, "but I haven't had a chance to test them out yet."

They lowered their wands and I quickly hugged them. Although it hadn't even been a week, I dreadfully missed them. I filled them in on the nightmare that was Hogwarts and they sympathized. I asked them to downplay my stories to Mum and Dad because I had a mission I needed to take care of first and I didn't need to be pulled from school just yet.

“What sort of mission?” Fred asked curiously.

I hesitated, but knew they had always been honest and straightforward with me, telling me secrets they dared not tell the rest of the family. “We’re taking Sword of Gryffindor away from Snape,” I said.

“Wicked,” they replied in unison.

“I know it’s dangerous,” I admitted, reading the worry behind their admiration. “But I can’t just sit back knowing it’s in his office when Dumbledore wanted Harry to have it. Any ideas on how to find that password?”

“You could try asking the Castle for help,” Fred suggested. “The portraits, the ghosts.”

“The House-Elves,” George replied. “That Dobby will go bonkers if you tell him it’s to help Harry Potter.”

I considered all their suggestions. It certainly beat hiding beneath a Cloak outside Snape’s office, hoping that Snape would forget that the room automatically opened for him, or waiting for some teacher to parade through and yell the password at the gargoyles. I would only do that as a last resort, if all else failed.

“What’s the latest news on the outside?” I asked, hoping they had something on the Trio other than their elongated stay at the house of Black.

“For starters,” Fred said, “Ted Tonks is going to run soon. He reckons he’ll be safer alone since he’s only one person. We’ve been trying to urge him to come to the safe house but he refuses to be a burden.”

“Although we might have to start looking for a second safe house,” George said. “Our first one is getting full and we need Ministry level magic to make it bigger. Unfortunately, I doubt the Ministry would cooperate at the state it’s in.”

“What about Dad?”

"Dear old Dad doesn't have the ability to make a whole house bigger," Fred informed. "Maybe a flying car, but not a house."

"The good news is that we are building up our forces stronger than ever out here," George said. "Katie, Oliver, Alicia, Angelina, and Cho are ready to act as soon as we need them. The Order has actually sent them as representatives to recruit different races of magical creatures for the cause."

"Like what sort of creatures?" I asked.

"Elves, Dwarves, Gremlins, Fairies, Nymphs, Fawns, Centaurs," Fred said. "They've said they've had very little luck finding any large tribes. It seems that they've all went into hiding."

"They found the Centaurs," George reminded him. "Prideful and stubborn, those ones. No luck."

I thought about the Centaurs in the Forbidden Forest and how Harry had talked about them. I was reminded of Firenze who was no longer allowed to teach here at Hogwarts and how he could not return to the forest because of his beliefs. I wondered where he was now.

"And what about the Trio?" I asked.

Fred and George started to grin wider than I had seen them grin all summer. The news must have been good. I looked from one to the other, expecting one to start talking soon, but they seemed to enjoy the anticipation.

"Dad thinks they broke into the Ministry," Fred said finally.

"They *what?*" I screamed.

"All evidence points to it," George explained. "Three ministry workers claiming they had been attacked. Apparently, Umbridge had Moody's eye watching over one room because she claims that went missing, which basically alerted the whole damn place that there were intruders."

"A small group of Muggleborns were freed," Fred went on. "Umbridge and Yaxley were attacked but unharmed. Pity, don't you think?"

"But couldn't that had been anyone?" I asked. "A lot of people must hate Umbridge and Yaxley."

"But not everyone has a stag Patronus, do they?" George replied. "If the rumors are right, the Undesirables just walked right into the belly of the beast, proclaimed loud and clear that they were there, and got away. They pretty much just pulled the biggest prank of the century."

"Dad reckons he talked to one of them," Fred said. "A Death Eater by the name of Runcorn warned him that he was being watched. Dad said it didn't make much sense at the time, but he was sure after all the commotion settled, it was one of them using Polyjuice Potion."

"But why did they break in?" I asked. "It wasn't a large amount of Muggleborns. They didn't permanently injure any of the enemies. Why would they risk so much to do so little?"

"Search me," George said, looking at his watch. "But it's time for us to go. We're meeting Ted again for one more go at convincing him."

With a crack, they Disapparated away and I was left alone in the darkness to ponder the actions of the Trio. *Why would they risk so much exposure to do so little?* I thought. I hated Umbridge and Yaxley as much as they did, but the whole mission felt like it was suicide. I'm sure they were lucky to make it out alive.

Exiting the tunnel and on my way back to the Common Room, I stopped outside Snape's office. If I was lucky, maybe someone would come along and say the password. After several minutes, I figured that I would have no such luck. Besides, I bet most people were down at dinner anyhow. When I entered another hallway, I stopped again, grateful that I could not be seen.

Pansy Parkinson grabbed Draco's arm and stopped him rushing away from her. "Draco, talk to me!" she squealed.

Draco's eyes were distant and his blond hair reflected the torch light against the walls. "What do you want me to say, Pansy?" he asked softly.

"What have you been doing?" Pansy questioned. "I haven't heard from you all summer, Draco. And you've been avoiding me. Crabbe and Goyle said you've been avoiding them, too."

"I haven't been avoiding anyone," Draco replied, his voice cold.

Pansy laughed loudly, the sound echoing off the seemingly empty corridors. "Maybe Crabbe was right. Maybe you have lost your nerve."

Draco glared at her but said nothing else. From beneath my cloak, I stared curiously at the Slytherin that had almost murdered Albus Dumbledore. He had been trying to do it all last year to no success. Even with the Headmaster cornered and disarmed, he had been unable to perform the deed.

Pansy must have been thinking the same thing. "I'm starting to think you're all talk," she sneered. "Boasting all last year how the Dark Lord had a special assignment for you. I bet the rumors are true then. You couldn't kill Dumbledore."

"I would have," Draco said, but it was obvious that his voice was wavering, "but Snape had to interfere. He took my glory."

"You're lying!" Pansy said. "I bet you wanted to take that protection Dumbledore offered you, too. You want to betray the Dark Lord."

Draco spoke up fast this time, raising his voice. "Have you ever been commanded to murder, Pansy?" he asked, spit spraying from his mouth. "No, I didn't think so. If you think it's that easy, take your wand and go kill someone right now. In fact, why don't you lure Potter here by killing his precious girlfriend?"

I instinctively gripped my wand.

"On second thought," he said, pulling his wand from his cloak and thrusting it into her hands, "if you're so worried about my loyalties, kill

me now. If you think it's so easy, strike me down with my own wand." He turned the wand to be pointed towards his chest.

Pansy recoiled and pushed the wand back into Draco's hand.

"My family is nothing to him," Draco said softly. "He invites that filthy Greyback into my house, who would rather eat me than protect me. He shames my father by destroying his wand. He doesn't give a damn about my mother. And I'm supposed to be happy about that?"

"Hold your tongue, Draco," she hissed.

"What are you going to do, Pansy?" Draco asked, laughing pitifully at his situation. "Turn me in? Tell the Dark Lord that I can't kill someone?" His eyes glistened over.

"I'll do what I have to do," she sneered, turning from him and walking down the hallway. Without turning, she said, "You better start rethinking your priorities."

When Pansy was out of sight, Draco groaned loudly and kicked the wall. He swore several times and finally just stood there, his wand gripped so tightly that his knuckles whitened. His usual cocky sneer had transformed into hatred, but it wasn't for the girl that had just walked out of his life, it was for himself.

The first meeting of the DA was held on the last day of the week. We met with great caution in the Room of Requirement, but not for practicing our spells, but for something that meant so much more. We discussed the Carrows's horrible influence. Amycus's lessons were beginning to become less about defending and more about *using* Dark magic. Aleto had successfully turned the course of Muggle Studies into a hate-class for the non-magic folk.

The First Years we had officially taken under our wings were getting along fine since they had a mentor, although we dared not introduce them to the DA yet. Angerona was a delightful eleven-year-old who reminded me a lot of myself. She was fiery and determined to prove herself. She had even expressed a desire to stand up to the Carrows but didn't want to be punished.

When Neville introduced the idea for the theft of the Sword, everyone was completely supportive. They all felt it was their duty to procure the Goblin-made weapon for Harry. Neville assigned them each a portion of the castle's objects to question about the password.

"We could really use more help," Michael said. "We're only fourteen covering every single portrait in the castle."

Neville thought about it for a second and said, "It's not a bad idea, but I don't know who we can trust."

"We can't just go around parading the idea," Ernie replied.

"What about our First Years?" Parvati asked.

"No," Neville said. "We can't ask something like that of them." He searched the lot of us and we each agreed. "What we need is a way for people to know we're here without actually seeking them out."

Silence embraced the room. Each person thought carefully, attempting to find the best way to go about this. My mind turned the problem over, considering the options, and then I had an idea. Inspired by my actions of first year that caused everyone to act accordingly, I whispered, "Graffiti."

The idea was popular. The boys all took the extra job of spreading the message through the corridors. As the DA departed, they were discussing what kind of messages they would be using.

I had never been inside the Kitchen even though I had heard plenty of stories from Fred and George. No password was needed, they said, all you had to do was tickle the pear and your world would open to plenty of culinary treats. Food was not on my mind this time around. I needed the password and who better to ask than the creatures that were often overlooked by wizards.

Traveling through the hallways on my way there, I passed by several graffiti messages done beautifully by the boys. *Dumbledore's Army Still Recruiting... Albus Dumbledore: The Real Headmaster.... Snape needs to wash his hair...* They branched out a bit on the messages we wanted but the effect would still be the same.

I stood at the portrait of the giant fruit bowl and stared curiously at it. I knocked.

After several seconds, Dobby, with a loud crack, Apparated out in front of me and greeted me with a loud hello. "Dobby is happy to see Ginny Wheezy! Does she want something to eat?"

"No, Dobby, but thanks," I said. "I have something I need to ask you."

"It is an honor, it is," Dobby said excitedly, his ears bobbing up and down.

"I need the password for Snape's office," I asked slowly. "Can you get it for me?"

Dobby shook his head violently and pulled his ears. "Dobby is a free elf," he said, "but Dobby has sworn to protect you and the other students. Dobby cannot help put you in danger."

"Calm down," I said, grabbing his hands and lifting him up so he couldn't hurt himself. When he had stopped struggling, I placed him back to his feet. Frustrated with my lack of successes, I asked, "Who has sworn you to protect us?"

Crack

Another house elf had appeared and it took several seconds to recognize him. It was Kreacher, dressed in his raggedy cloth and looking old as ever. I had almost forgotten that he worked here during the school year. I did not want to deal with the rude little monster. About to excuse myself in failure, I noticed a necklace around the elf's neck.

In a quick motion and without realizing, I had Kreacher in my grasp and was yelling at him. "Where did you get the locket, Kreacher?" I screamed. "Did you steal it from Harry, you ungrateful little troll!"

"Kreacher has stolen nothing!"

Dobby was jumping all around, pulling at my sleeves and squeaking. "Wheezy! No! Kreacher has changed! Kreacher has only nice things to say about Harry Potter!"

I stopped shaking the ancient elf and looked at him seething. "Is this true?" I asked.

Kreacher nodded. "Master Harry has been very kind to Kreacher," he croaked. When I put him back to his feet, he gripped the locket and continued, "Master Harry gave Master Regulus's locket back to Kreacher... but Kreacher failed..." He burst into large tears and started stomping his feet.

"Regulus's locket?" I repeated, my mind racing. *Regulus Black... R.B... could it be?* "Kreacher," I said, watching the elf calm down when I said his name, "did Regulus take something from Vol... The Dark Lord?"

Kreacher nodded. "He told Kreacher to destroy the locket but Kreacher could not do it!" he cried, the tears welling up inside him again. "Mundungus Fletcher stole it. When Kreacher brought him to Master Harry, Mundungus did not have it. Said he gave it some lady. Master Harry promised Kreacher he'd finish the job."

"What lady?"

"Umbridge."

I gasped in a fit of sick joy. It all made sense now. Even as I processed Kreacher's words, I pulled from my memory banks the locket that we had found while cleaning the House of Black. None of us could open it and discarded it as trash. Mundungus must have stolen it along with the other heirlooms and sold it to Umbridge. *That's* why they invaded the Ministry and *that's* why they targeted that foul toad lady.

I began to think wild thoughts. The locket was a Horcrux and if they had destroyed it, did that mean the war would be over soon? Could there be any more of the evil objects that kept Voldemort alive? Would Harry finally be back in my life?

“Does the news make Miss Wheezy happy?” Dobby asked.

I thought about it and nodded half heartedly. “It certainly clears up a lot, I just wish Harry cared enough to let me know,” I said. The words tasted bitter as I said them, not fully believing what I had uttered.

“But Master Harry does care for you,” Kreacher said. “Kreacher wanted to say that it is an honor to finally meet the Wheezy that means so much to Master.”

I failed to correct him that we had already met but I couldn’t blame him for not remembering. Back then, he was a completely different elf, loathing and mentally unstable. It seemed that the locket had a profound effect on the little guy. I smiled at what he said, forgetting the bitterness momentarily. “Does Harry talk about me a lot?” I asked.

“Not Master,” Kreacher said. “Master keeps many things to himself. Kreacher hears Master’s friends talk about how he feels. Kreacher even hears Master’s thoughts sometimes.”

This made me feel much better about the situation. I finally had some answers to one of the many questions I had been asking but it presented far too many more questions now. If they had destroyed the locket, why hadn’t they returned yet? The only logical explanation was that there were more Horcruxes.

My mood was immediately struck down a few notches as each of the members of the DA approached me throughout the following few days to inform me of their progress. Each person had a similar story. The pictures, portraits, suits of armor, gargoyles, and ghosts had each refused to help because they were sworn to keep the students out of danger.

Without that password, we wouldn’t be able to get that Sword.

With our failure to retrieve the password from any of the castle components, I considered confronting one of the teachers, but if the portraits and house-elves were sworn to protect us, no professor would willingly put us into harm’s way. In fact, McGonagall had warned us to proceed with the DA with extreme caution and she was not hesitant to add that she thought the graffiti was not a smart idea.

We expected an enthusiastic response from the student body concerning the graffiti. Many congratulated our valor, but feared too much for their lives to participate. I shared many angry and harsh words with my peers, most of who didn't deserve the mistreatment. The only ones willing to help were the First Years we had been mentoring.

"Katie spoke highly of the DA," Angerona said to me as we passed by one the vandalized messages. Filch was working vigorously to scrub the words away, but I knew he would have no luck removing it without proper magic. *Another present from Fred and George.* Angerona looked at me thoughtfully and said, "I want to help, Ginny."

"I'm sorry, Ang, but I feel responsible for you," I said. "We decided we couldn't possibly ask you or any other of the First Years..."

"Harry was a First Year when he fought You-Know-Who and won," Angerona said matter-of-factly and sounding much like myself when I was younger. "And you're not *asking* me to help. I *offered*. Wasn't that the point of the messages?"

She was a smart little thing. Had we all been so perceptive at that age? Hermione for sure, but I certainly was not. I had been possessed by a Dark Wizard's memory and had not been very attentive of things.

"You've been distracted," Angerona observed. "Is everything okay?"

In my head, I listed all the reasons I had been feeling like I was, the latest being no access to the password I needed. Before I could answer, Amycus grabbed me roughly by the arm. "Follow me, Weasley." I wrenched my arm away as if his touch was venomous, but followed him to the dungeons.

Outside the bleak destination, Amycus explained that I needed extra practice with the Unforgivables. "And no funny business," he commanded. "I had to punish a Seventh Year for refusing. When I come back, I want that hooligan in there to wish he never even heard of the word disobedience."

Of course, I wasn't about to use the torture curse on anyone, no matter what the consequence of refusing could be. Opening the large wooden door, the last person I thought I'd see was a blond-haired Slytherin chained to a chair.

Draco's cold eyes peered upwards as the torches cast shadows over his pale face. His gaze met mine and his lip twitched as if he wanted to say something but held back.

I smiled brazenly, pulled my wand, and watched the boy flinch only a fraction. I slowly walked to him and placed the tip of my wand against his forehead, right between the eyes.

"For everything you put me through," I whispered harshly, "for everything you put Harry through..." I pressed harder and he didn't flinch this time. "I would have every right to torture you and not regret it. I might even come back to Gryffindor a hero."

"Do it then, Weasley," he hissed, bracing himself.

I placed my wand against the shackles and chanted, "*Alohomora!*" The locks and chains fell from his wrists and body, clanging loudly to the stone floor. "You're better to me in your right mind, Malfoy"

He sat there rubbing his wrists and staring at me with a puzzled expression. I placed my wand back into my robes. It might not have been the smartest move to disarm myself but his wand wasn't on him. I felt dangerously safe.

"Why are you in detention?" I asked.

"Doesn't matter," he muttered. "But my father..."

"From what I understand, your father has lost his status under your precious Dark Lord's reign. I doubt Lucius has any influence over any decisions being made."

Draco's scowl lessened as I said the words that reached deep into the heart I wasn't sure he had. "How do you know that?" he questioned.

I ignored his inquiry. "Last June, you were supposed to murder Albus Dumbledore."

"I would have, but Snape-

"Malfoy, shut up," I growled. "You're not fooling anyone. Dumbledore offered you sanctuary and you were going to take it, weren't you?"

Draco's eyes bore into me, trying to uncover my motive. "So what if I was?" he asked. "He's dead anyhow. It doesn't matter what I was going to do, does it?"

"It matters more now than ever," I said. "Help us and when the time comes, we can help you."

"And if I refuse, you'll torture me?"

I shook my head. "Then we forget we had this conversation. I'll go back to my Hogwarts resistance. You can go back to your miserable existence, hoping Greyback won't take a bite out of your neck."

He shuddered. His hands rested on his lap and he actually succumbed to nervously moving them. For a second, I thought he was about to jump from the seat and attack me. Instead, he whispered, "I'm not joining your stupid little club or painting any messages on the walls."

I half-smiled, enjoying the fact that I had the upper hand. "No, I wouldn't expect you to. All I want from you is knowledge, Malfoy. You have ears where I do not. If you hear any news of my family, my friends, or Harry, I'd appreciate it if you passed that to me."

"How would you propose I do that without compromising myself or my family?"

"You're a Slytherin," I reminded him. "I'm sure you can think of a way while making yourself look good."

He shook his head in disbelief. "Knowledge," he repeated. "Would that include information regarding the castle as well?"

I nodded. "I have a simple question for you already. Do you know any passwords in this castle other than the one to get into your Common Room?"

He eyed me curiously. Of course, he could lie to me and I'd never know, but I wouldn't have gotten this far in the conversation if he wasn't at least considering my offer. Finally, he shook his head and said, "No."

Silence between us. Was he deceiving me? I looked into his hopeless eyes and I saw the truth. He was being honest.

"Tell me, Weasley," Draco said. "How do your friends feel about our little agreement?"

"They don't know," I replied. I dug into my pockets and pulled a Galleon from it. I flipped it to him. "If you need help, this is how you contact me. And, Draco..."

He looked up quickly at the use of his first name.

"When Carrow gets back, act like I tortured you."

A sneer spread across his face as he rubbed the coin in his hand. As I turned, I think I saw a glimmer of hope in his hopeless eyes. Maybe I had saved one soul that night.

With no luck at all finding the password, I fell into obsession. Any free time I had the next two weeks was devoted to waiting outside the entrance to Snape's office beneath my Invisibility Cloak, but while I was there, no one was entering.

I began skipping meals and losing sleep in hopes of hearing it. I'd wait hours into the night only to fall asleep against the wall. Luna would always find me in the morning and guide me back to my room. For the last two days before I discovered the password, I had even skived off every single one of my classes.

Neville and Luna were furious with me for not consulting them first about my arrangements with Draco. After heated arguments, I convinced them that it was beneficial, but not before I made Luna cry

and Neville refuse to sit in the same room with me. For good reason, Neville and Luna were extremely worried about me.

Yet in my world, the only thing that mattered was the Sword. Due to lack of sleep and food, I was constantly trembling and could barely hold my wand steady when I used it. To put it lightly, I was in a bad place emotionally and physically. I was floating dangerously close to a breakdown.

I found myself in the bathroom near the end of September, washing my face to cool my skin when I lost my balance. Disorientated, I practically collapsed on Angerona.

“Ginny!” she shouted. “What’s wrong?”

“...password...” I slurred.

“What?” she cried. “What are you talking about?”

“...password...” I repeated. “...Snape’s office...”

“When’s the last time you slept?”

I didn’t answer. She led me to Madam Pomfrey and helped me lie down. She fed me small amounts of food on Pomfrey’s orders. With food in my stomach, I realized how hungry I had been. She wiped my forehead with a washcloth in attempts to break the fever I had developed.

I awoke hours later. Angerona must have never left my side. I felt better than I did earlier but I still was very weak. Hugging her, I thanked the girl for caring for me. Supporting my weight, I sat up and said I had work to do.

She pushed me back down on the bed. “Autumn,” she said much to my confused face. “I heard one of the Carrows use it to get into Snape’s office.”

The word sobered me completely. It revitalized me and gave me a reason to keep pushing. With hope coursing through my veins, I grabbed my DA coin and sent the urgent message to all the members.

Much to Pomfrey and Angerona's complaints, I escaped from them and met the Army in the Room of Requirement.

We quickly formed a plan.

Luna, Neville, and I crept slowly up the stairs. Our wands were drawn, ready for anything. The mirrors were in our pocket and our ears were tuned in to pick up any warnings from our lookouts. Stepping into the empty office, several portraits spoke in outrage.

"Miss Weasley? Miss Lovegood? Mr. Longbottom?" said a familiar voice from the portrait that had been absent so many weeks ago. Dumbledore continued, "Judging from your covert appearance, I would have to guess that Professor Snape has not given you permission to be here."

My bitterness had built steadily over the past few weeks. Looking at my deceased Headmaster, I felt anger for his casual statements regarding his murderer. Surely he knew he shared an office with the foul man that had taken his life. With an attraction seemingly beyond my control, I walked towards the portrait.

"This is not the time for chitchat, Ginny," Neville hissed, passing by me. Despite his words of caution, he leaned against Snape's desk and waited for me. Luna followed behind him and followed his example.

I couldn't take my eyes away from the blue eyes hidden behind half-moon spectacles. This was the man who had all the answers that I had been seeking. "Where's Harry?" I asked, knowing full well that this was completely not the time but ultimately not caring. "Where did you send him?"

"What I said before has not changed since I lost my life," Dumbledore replied, but his eyes did not twinkle. Perhaps eyes can't twinkle when they are imitations of life.

"So I'll only know when he wins or he dies?" I asked, a little bit louder than before. "Or will secrets still be kept from me?"

"My dear, do you not understand...?"

I cut him off and screamed without reservation, "I LOVE HIM!" Several other headmasters opened their eyes from the slumber. "I should know what he's doing." Tears were beginning to form but I intercepted them. I angrily wiped them away and cursed myself for being so weak.

"Ginny, please..." Neville said behind me.

"Mr. Longbottom, let the girl speak her mind," Dumbledore said. "Feelings that are left to smolder inside will only grow stronger. I am sure she has been in dire need to express herself like this for too long."

"But, Professor..."

Dumbledore held up his hand and quieted him. Even in his two-dimensional existence, he had not lost his influence. He had always maintained a calm collected perception of the events around him. His unchanged personality infuriated me and I lost my reservations.

"What is a Horcrux?" I questioned loudly.

Dumbledore did not look at all surprised. He stared at me in admiration, concentrating as he did so many times when he was alive. Perhaps this was habit from his Legilimency, but no mind-reading could be performed by a picture.

"You have always known more than most give you credit for," Dumbledore said softly. "I have only wished to protect you. If you knew the truth, I can only imagine what it would do to you and how you would seek Harry out. Your place is here, standing between the students and the evil that controls this school."

"You couldn't have known," I said. "Not even you can predict the future. If you could, you wouldn't be dead..." I felt no need to further that statement to him. The rest was implied... *Harry wouldn't be gone... Voldemort wouldn't have control... I wouldn't need to stand between students and evil...*

"My time was limited," Dumbledore replied. "As was Voldemort's lack of influence in this school. Yes, *your* place is here. Harry's is out there on his quest."

"He's got the locket," I said and Dumbledore looked pleased. "So why isn't he back? Why hasn't he destroyed it and come back to us... to *me*?"

For a fleeting second, his blue eyes moved. I quickly followed his wandering gaze and found the Sword of Gryffindor. And that's when another piece of the puzzle fell into place. The reason they hadn't returned was because they had no way of destroying the locket. *Basilisk venom*, I remembered Hermione saying, and the sword, some way or another had kept the venom when Harry stabbed the monster in the Chamber.

"What are you waiting for?" Anthony's voice emanated from Neville's pocket. "Snape is on his way back right now."

"That's what they need the sword for, isn't it?" I asked. The weapon was the key to Harry's victory and his safe return to me. If I ever had a proper reason to steal it, I had one now.

Luna pointed her wand at the case and shouted, "*Reducto!*" The glass crumbled into shards. "Oh good," she said grinning. "That was easier than I expected."

Ignoring Dumbledore's pleas, I grabbed the hilt of the sword from among the sharp pieces, disregarding the quick jabs of pain in my hand where the glass pierced, and pulled the sword from its confines. I followed Luna and Neville as they descended the stairs.

As we reached the exit, the door opened and Snape stood there with several of our two-way mirrors in his hands. Sneering, he dropped them and stepped upon him as he came closer, the objects cracking beneath his boots. "Tell me," he snarled, "after you stole the sword from my office, how were you planning on getting it to the illustrious Mr. Potter?"

We slowly backed up the stairs. Neville and Luna wielded their wands towards the Headmaster. Flanking them from behind, I gripped the

sword feverishly in my hands. I elevated the blade in a threatening manner over my protégés' heads.

Snape laughed mockingly. "You're going to kill me?" His upper lip curled and his wand was pointed directly at us. "Do it." He came closer, causing us to step up one more. "But be sure you are prepared for the consequences. Murder, no matter how justified or premeditated, is not to be taken lightly."

"And did you take it lightly when you killed an unarmed man?" Neville shouted as we backed up one more step.

"You were a coward!" Luna shrieked, though her voice was quivering.

"Do not call me a COWARD!" Snape shouted

By this time, we were at the top of the stairs and into the room. Stumbling backwards from the force of his words, I lost my grip on the sword and it fell to the floor clattering.

"Severus," Dumbledore said. What good was he going to do now? He could only pitifully speak in our defense. "I beg you to be compassionate."

"Do not tell me how to run this school, Old Man!" Snape shouted at the portrait and I imagined a or similar scene happening before. Snape turned back to us. "I have every authority and right to kill you three right now, but magical blood spilled is a waste," he said. "Hagrid has business to attend to in the Forest tomorrow night. You will serve your detentions with the giant oaf all week."

Luna and Neville literally had to drag me away from the office. I made a dive for the sword but they were able to restrain me. Shouting every obscenity I knew, they pulled me away from Snape kicking and screaming. My voice echoed off the corridors as I shrieked, "WE HAVE TO GO BACK! WE NEED THE SWORD! NO!"

Uncontrollable rage filled me. Kicking over the potted plants and chucking anything small enough for me to get my hands on, I rampaged with fury. We had been so close to victory and it had been snatched away so easily. I took the mirror I had in my pocket and

flung it, shattering it against the wall of the Common Room upon impact.

I couldn't take it anymore. Hyperventilating, I sat on the couch, slightly rocking back and forth and muttering incoherently between breaths. The lack of sleep and proper nutrition had taken its toll on my body and mind. My heart ached with loneliness. I had tried so hard to be strong for Harry and I had failed. I had reached my breaking point.

I don't remember Luna finding a seat beside me, but she was there, stroking my hair and promising me things I didn't think would ever come to pass. When she spoke, she spoke soothingly, "Snape found everyone in the halls with the mirrors. They weren't punished. We... we were lucky."

It didn't matter to me how I was going to be punished. Nothing could be as bad as what I was feeling. Put the torture curse back on me for all I cared. Luna continued to stroke my hair as I trembled viciously.

"Ginny," Luna said, "if you knew the future and Harry was going to die, what would you do?"

The question was a curious one but I knew my answer. "I would do the same thing Harry would do for me," I whispered. "I would do anything in my power to stop it."

"What if that was the only way to stop You-Know-Who?"

I stiffened my body and let the words take effect. "Harry has to die...?"

"I don't know," Luna said, "but if that were the case, what do you think Harry would do?"

I swallowed hard, knowing exactly what the love of my life would do if presented with that situation. If Harry had to sacrifice himself to save the world, he might hesitate, but he would be willing. If it meant that the ones he loved were spared, he would...

Maybe that was the point. Maybe my knowledge of Harry's destiny could compromise the victory that was so desperately needed in this world. To put things bluntly, I was being selfish.

As Luna consoled me, I wept into her shoulder, noting that there hadn't been another year where I cried so much. With every tear, I released the feelings of resentment and bitterness. They dissolved into my robes and Luna's hair, freeing me from the anger I felt. As the night wore on, I don't remember falling asleep.

I returned relatively to normal. My eating habits and sleep schedule had taken a healthy turn. I still missed *them* terribly but I had found a new sense of understanding that I had been lacking since Yaxley had broken something in me at the wedding.

The three of us walked towards the outside the following night for our detention with Hagrid. We were in a light mood since we weren't expecting anything more than a stroll through the forest.

"I'm sorry for how I've been this past month," I said as we exited the castle and entered the soft light of the approaching dusk. "I've been a real prat."

"I didn't like you very much," Luna said honestly, "but I knew you'd get better."

"It's nice to have our Ginny back," Neville replied, gripping my hand and squeezing it tightly. "We've missed you."

"I've missed me, too," I replied, thankful that I had such understanding friends. "And I'm sorry about not consulting you two about Malfoy."

"I've been thinking about that," Neville said. "I think you did the right thing, but I'm not dealing with Malfoy. I'll leave that up to you."

"But Ginny," Luna said, her eyes showing fear. "What if you fall in love with Draco?"

There was an awkward silence as I stopped abruptly and gazed at Luna in absurdity. Without warning, I began to laugh loudly, soon

followed by Neville. Luna cocked her head a little to the left, not understanding what she had said to cause such laughter.

"Thanks, Luna," I said through tears of amusement. "I needed that."

When we found Hagrid, he greeted us with a hello and tried to look displeased with our appearance. "Yeh kids are goin' ter get yerselves killed," he muttered as he placed a chain around Fang's neck. "What were yeh thinkin', breakin' inter Snape's office like that, stealin' that Sword?"

"We were just trying to fulfill Dumbledore's last request," Neville replied. "We're sorry we worried you."

"Of course yeh worried me!" Hagrid responded. "But I'm also ruddy proud of the lot of yeh, standin' up ter Snape an' the Carrows. Yeh won' be able to try that stunt again though. Snape won' keep that Sword here now that yeh almost made away wit' it."

Hagrid led us beside his hut which had been repaired since the fire had consumed it last term. With his pink umbrella in one hand and Fang's leash in the other, he led us into the Forest.

"I imagine Snape thought we'd hate it with you in the Forest," Luna said, "but I find your company enjoyable."

"It's strange," I replied. "Snape's been here for years. You'd think he'd know by now how much we like Hagrid."

"Do you think he's protecting us?" Luna asked.

I was about to deny it adamantly, but I stopped. Snape had been acting out of character for a vindictive murderer. There were his actions regarding Grimmauld Place and the Carrows' interrogation of me several weeks back. Add the incident with the sword and that was three things Snape had done to benefit us.

I looked at Luna thoughtfully. "Protecting us?"

"He murdered Dumbledore," Neville said softly. "Remember?"

I nodded, feeling the tug at my heart. I bit my lip in thought, thinking that something just wasn't adding up correctly.

"Besides," Hagrid interjected, "it's not goin' to be a picnic in here." He glanced nervously around at the trees and shadows. Fang sniffed the air and whined. "The dangerous creatures in the Forest can' come inter school grounds because of the protective wards." He poked the air with his umbrella. "We're removin' them fer a short period tonight."

"*What?*" we three exclaimed.

"After yer adventure las' night, they want the dementors patrollin' the grounds an' hallways at night so there's no repeat." He shuddered as if a dementor had moved close to him already. "I don't think my one Patronus is goin' to do much to those ruddy things."

"The joke's on them," Neville replied, displaying his wand. "All the members of the DA can produce a Patronus." He patted the big guy on the elbow. "Don't worry, Hagrid. We'll have at least two people down here every night to assist you."

We each cast our separate Patronuses to prove to Hagrid what we were talking about and to protect us as we were about to let the nightmarish creatures into the castle grounds.

I met the twins for the last time the following night in the secret passageway. Immediately after dinner and before the dementors were let in, I grabbed my Cloak and maneuvered my way towards them.

I embraced my brothers for a long time and then filled them in on the previous five weeks. They looked proud of their little sister, saying that we were becoming the best pranksters the school had ever seen. When I told them about the mirrors and asked for a restock, they said that they couldn't.

They were going into hiding and starting a radio program. They explained the basic concept that Lee had outlined at the wedding and who was going to be involved. They called it Potterwatch and said they were going to make me guess the first password, but in lieu of

my recent password dilemmas, they gladly told me that *my* name was the first one.

They had no news on the Trio, but did inform me that Tonks was two months pregnant. I squealed in excitement for that bit of information. Hugging them goodbye, they said they would try to make it back with more supplies.

Exiting the passageway, my cloak snagged and fell off of me. Scrambling to put it back on, I turned and came face to face with Draco Malfoy.

He bent down and picked up my Cloak from the floor. "Well, Weasley," he ran the fabric through his hands. "I see Potter left you with something to remember him by."

I held my tongue, hoping he'd see that I wasn't looking for a fight, hoping he'd remember our arrangement.

"DRACO?" came the voice of Amycus. "DID YOU FIND HER?"

Draco swore and threw the Cloak back to me. I managed to pull it on just in time as Amycus rounded the corner.

"Did you find the girl?" Amycus asked.

Time stood still. I must have taken too long with the twins and it must be after hours. Soon the dementors were going to be in the hallways. Somehow they knew I was out of my bed. I knew I should have worn my Cloak before I left the tower. I waited in anticipation to hear what Draco would say.

"No," he lied.

"Then who were you talking to?" Amycus asked.

"I thought I saw her," he said. "...but it must have been someone else."

I tiptoed around the pair as Amycus studied Draco's face for any indication that he was lying. Behind Amycus, I stopped and looked towards the blond-haired Slytherin.

"Professor Carrow," he said, his eyes darting around in hopes that I was still listening. "Will you need any help securing the secret passageways?"

"Alecto and I don't need students help with this one," Amycus replied. "The dark magic we plan to put on the entrances is not known by Seventh Years."

"My friends and I use the passages sometimes," Draco said. "Should we stop?"

"Unless you want to die, Draco, be my guest and keep using them." Amycus smiled. "But I'd hate to waste such a wonderful spell on a Slytherin. Let us hope for a Weasley or a Longbottom."

"Or a Potter?"

Amycus laughed loudly. "If he gets past the Caterwauling Charm in the village, then yes, our spells will take care of him rather nicely." He motioned for Draco to follow him. "Now, we continue our search, Draco."

The Carrows were not the most intelligent Death Eaters. We were subtle with our rebellion in the first month of our school year, focusing mostly on acquiring the Sword. We refused to participate in the anti-Muggle propaganda homework and refused to torture our peers.

After the incident with the Sword, they caught on quickly that we weren't just randomly revolting and that we weren't individuals without a sense of unity. We were a cohesive group standing between them and the students. Once they realized this, they increased their efforts to break us. Needless to say, we increased our efforts to break them right back.

They let the dementors in, we sent our Patronuses to counteract that. They sent us to detention to torture the students, we released them. They sent us to be tortured, we basically just asked for more.

The strange mystery of Snape did not go away. It became apparent which punishments were issued by the Headmaster and which by the Carrows. Whereas Snape reissued Umbridge's decree of no clubs, organizations, or teams, the Carrows themselves would torture us in detention. When I was caught by Snape casting my Patronus, he banned me from Hogsmeade. When the Carrows caught me, I was whipped. I still have the marks on my back.

September faded away and October was upon us.

Nearing mid-October, I sat with Neville during dinner. His face had not yet fully healed from previous detentions and I doubt they would ever be the same. You wouldn't know it by sitting with him. He was still full of hope and optimism, even when other members of the DA looked lost.

It was amazing that we could still talk about normal things even with the Hogwarts Rebellion taking place. We chatted about the upcoming test in Transfiguration and wondered if McGonagall would take it easy on us.

While scooting closer to the table, my wand dropped from my pockets and rolled several feet away. I stood up to retrieve and as I bent down to pick it up, someone tripped over my hand. Looking up, Draco was sprawled on the ground. Crabbe and Goyle assisted him in standing again.

No one had seen except for several First Years sitting close by and they dared not laugh at a Slytherin. Draco's eyes flashed towards the table that saw him and then back to me. He brushed his robe off and sneered. "What are you doing, Weasley?" he asked. "Miss the floors you have to sleep on at home?"

Crabbe and Goyle snickered and I rolled my eyes. His words no longer had any effect on me since I knew they were just for show. "Shut it, Malfoy," I said lamely.

"I heard the Snatchers found someone who looked an awful lot like your brother," Draco called to me as I turned from him. "I thought he was home dying."

I froze. *They had caught Ron?* I turned back to him with pleading scared eyes.

"Pity he got away," Draco said. "I would have loved to read that headline." He held his hand up and spread it against the air. *"Harry Potter's Weasel Friend Caught."*

I rushed up to him, wand drawn, and flattened him against the wall. I pressed the tip against his temple and he flinched. Quietly, I whispered, "Thanks, Malfoy." I released him.

He pulled his wand from his robes and pointed it at me as I turned from him, my red hair dancing behind me. Although one should never turn their back on an enemy, I knew this particular Slytherin wasn't about to curse me, especially since Professor Flitwick entered the scene and asked Draco what happened.

I plopped down beside Neville with a smug look on my face.

"What was that about?" he whispered.

"Snatchers almost got Ron," I whispered back.

--

My hand wrote furiously into the pages of the diary as an unknown writer responded back to me. In fast motion, I witnessed the events of my first year, swirling through a fog.

In the chamber, I watched Tom escape from the diary and laugh at my stupidity to trust him. "Did you not fear me?" he hissed.

Instead of Harry prevailing this time, the Basilisk had killed him. He lay on the floor of the cavernous room at my feet. I was Ginny Weasley no more. I was Tom Riddle. I was Lord Voldemort. I was...

"I miss you so much, Ginny."

--

I bolted up in my bed, awakening from my nightmare, covered in a thick blanket of sweat and tears. I grabbed my wand and threw light into every candle and torch in the room. The mid-October wind whistled outside.

"Harry?" I called out to the room.

No answer.

I could have sworn I had been awoken by his voice. It was right beside me, whispering in my ear, as if he was saying it as he stood beside the bed. I shuddered because I knew it had not been part of a dream. To my disappointment, I could not find whom I was seeking.

Somewhere though, Harry was thinking of me, wondering if I was alright, using the memory of my love to give himself hope. I closed my eyes and focused, hoping I could provide some kind of comfort to the man I loved that night.

I extinguished the lights and whispered into the darkness, "I miss you, too, Harry" and hoped he would hear.

Author Notes:

When I wrote chapter 12, I made Ginny very understanding of Harry's decision. In this chapter, Ginny begins to doubt his judgment and goes through a very hard time. Imagine that your best friend, your brother, and the love of your life are on a mission that might kill them. Your family is in constant danger. Your boyfriend broke up with you to keep you safe, but that idea was ripped to shreds as soon as you step foot in the school. I think that is more than enough to drive someone to have a small breakdown.

I might get some backlash on making Draco "good." If you read Deathly Hallows, I am only following the development of his character. In Malfoy Manor, it's obvious who Hermione is (maybe not Harry) but Draco still refuses to name her. When we get to the scene in the Room of Requirement, it may seem that Draco is working AGAINST Harry, but his actions remind me more of Snape. He refuses to hurt

anyone (that was all Crabbe and Goyle). I am convinced that Draco was tired of it all. I don't think it makes him "good" for assisting the Rebellion, I think it makes him more Slytherin. By helping in the smallest way that he is, he ensures that he and his family are safe if Voldy loses. I will address this more in further chapters.

Chapter Fifteen: Scars Will Fade

Near the end of October, I found myself constantly looking over my shoulder. If I stepped out of line, someone would be watching and someone would know. A few weeks later, we would make it a group rule to never travel anywhere alone.

Beneath my cloak, I had been listening to conversations around the school. Many students were losing hope and had begun to doubt that Harry would ever return. Many were starting to buy into the anti-Muggle teachings.

With the power of invisibility, I had resumed my mission of discovering what a Horcrux was. Unlike the Sword, I had not fallen into another obsession. The desire to know had returned to a healthy curiosity that I compared to the Trio's first year search for Nicolas Flamel.

I listened in on the Carrows whenever possible. I refused to come near Snape, for fear that he would sense me with his Legilimency. I wanted to talk to Dumbledore again, but knew the risk was far too dangerous. As I expected, my research through the library and its restricted section was fruitless. If Hermione had failed to wield results there, I shouldn't have expected to do any better.

As I continued to search without results, I increasingly felt that I would find nothing until the war was over and Harry had returned to me.

Less than a week from Halloween, there still hadn't been any news on Harry's whereabouts. It would be sixteen years since Voldemort was first defeated by infant Harry Potter. Had Harry visited Godric's Hallow? Had he laid his love upon the graves of his parents yet?

Wandering back from the library on the final night of my formal search, I suddenly felt the castle grow cold. I recognized that wave of chill. The dementors must have been let in early tonight. I drew my wand and readied myself.

At the far end of the hallway, Jimmy Peakes and Richie Coote were sprinting towards me. I noticed each carried a Quidditch broom and a Beater's bat as they passed by me panting. From the way they had

just come, two dementors had entered the hallway. I saw a flash of silver behind the soulless creatures. As it took the warmth from my heart, I ran after my fellow Gryffindors.

I was curious what they were up to and knew that if the dementors had overtaken them, they wouldn't have been able to defend themselves. I caught up with them on the seventh floor, yelling to each other, "We need to hide these things!"

The Room of Requirement answered their request and produced its door. They slipped in quickly and when I reached the entrance, my cloak slipped off. I stopped, turned around, and found a dementor several feet away.

I froze, unable to raise my wand, and I heard the voice of Tom Riddle in my head. Sinking to the floor, I felt the fabric of the creature's cloak tickle the back of my neck. Looking up feebly, I saw the silver flash of a doe Patronus and felt myself being pulled away from the scene.

"Ginny!" Coote called. "Are you okay?"

"Fine..." I muttered. I held my head in my hands, wishing for a piece of chocolate to soothe the effects of the dementors and wondering which of the DA members had changed their Patronus to a doe.

"Thanks for saving us," Peakes said.

"Me?" I shook my head. "I didn't cast that one. My Patronus is a horse. I don't know who saved us, but it wasn't me."

It was then that I noticed what the Room had become. It was a large cathedral with thousands of pieces of junk, most of which were dusty and grimy. If Hogwarts had an attic to store useless items, this must be the place.

"So what's your story?" I asked them.

Peakes and Coote glanced at each other and then grinned.

"You know how all Quidditch has been banned?" Peakes said. "Coote here and me have been itching to get back on a broom for weeks. Turns out we weren't the only ones."

"Demelza, Summerby, and Fawcett," Coote went on. "The five of us went out to the Pitch tonight for a small game."

"You didn't invite me?" I questioned teasingly.

"We figured you had enough things to worry about," Peakes replied. "Besides..." He ran a hand through his hair and his eyes got bigger. "...we weren't playing for more than ten minutes when the dementors attacked. We ran."

"The Patronus saved us," Coote said. "After we found you, I just assumed you had something to do with it."

"Sorry, boys," I answered shrugging. I pulled my wand from my robes and shouted the incantation. A silver stallion burst from the tip and galloped around the room. "I'd love to take credit, but I can't."

The boys stared in wonder at the stallion that was pawing the ground. After several seconds, the silver creature faded into wisps of gray mist.

"We want in," Coote whispered, pulling his wand from his Quidditch robes and eyeing the wood in hopes of doing something great. "We want to be soldiers."

I looked from Coote to Peakes, who nodded in agreement. Considering their words, I walked slowly towards a cupboard that had several filthy books stacked on top. A handprint was outlined on the grime. "Are you sure you want to be involved?" I asked.

A piece of paper was wedged between two of the books. The part that was showing had the words *Dearest Lily*. Frowning, I pulled the paper from its imprisonment.

"Did you hear us, Ginny?" Peakes called to me. I looked back towards the boys and Peakes continued, "We know it's dangerous. We don't care. We want to help."

“We’re meeting here tomorrow night,” I answered, distracted by the old piece of parchment in my hands. I glanced down at the bottom but it was not signed.

When we checked the hallways for safety, I summoned my Patronus to guide us back to our Tower. There was no sign of the mysterious silver doe. Hurriedly, I entered my room, placed the old letter on the night stand and smoothed out its wrinkles.

Dearest Lily

You refuse to look at me and you refuse to speak to me. I don’t know what else to do. This letter is my last resort. I hope you read this. I hope it makes a difference.

You understand me more than anyone ever has. You have to understand that I feel like I belong to something for the first time in my life. I feel like I have a purpose. I’m sorry that some of the things I do are questionable, but can’t you try, at least, to understand from my point of view?

I never wanted it to be like this. I never should have called you what I did and I know that kind of scar will never fade. From this day forward, I have erased it from my vocabulary. Never again, Lily, will that deplorable word touch these lips.

I’m lost without you. I miss you so much. I love

And that was it. There was no more to the letter. I scanned over every bit of the parchment but only found three letters on the front: *L.A.E.* Nothing else was written, not even a scribble. I placed my wand upon the paper and commanded it to reveal its secrets, but it had none. Folding the letter back up, I placed it inside my drawer and called it a night.

We had the meeting the following night. The members of the DA welcomed Peakes, Coote, Summerby, Demelza, and Sarah into our group. We updated them on our organization and gave them their coins.

At 7:30, I fumbled through the wireless. With my name as the password, I was delighted as I finally tuned in. We gathered around the radio, eagerly awaiting the news.

"I would like to welcome you to the first broadcast of *Potterwatch*," Lee's voice said, and I mouthed to everyone who it was. "For the first order of business, I'd like to thank two very good friends of mine that shall remain nameless. Without their innovative ideas and inventive minds, none of this would be possible. I'm River and our correspondents, for now, will be Royal, Romulus, and Raphael.

"If you're listening, you obviously know what we are doing and how to find us. We would appreciate if you would pass us along to anyone who wishes to remain knowledgeable.

"With that said, we have a number of missing persons and deaths to report. Former Muggle Studies professor of Hogwarts Charity Burbage has still not turned up after she allegedly retired. Her husband asks that if anyone has any news of her whereabouts to please contact him. Also reported missing is Muggleborn Hermione Granger and her parents..."

There were gasps around the room but I shushed them.

"...Mad-Eye Moody," Lee said, already reaching the list of the deceased. "Several Muggleborn and former Hogwarts students have been found murdered over the weekend. We send our condolences to the families and housemates of Justin Finch-Fletchley, Megan Jones, and Marcus Belby..."

We all made noises of anger, but the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws of the room called out in sadness.

"Listeners, I'd like to have a minute of silence to honor the lost and the fallen."

We bowed our heads and waited for the minute to pass.

"Thank you," Lee said. "I'd like to introduce Royal. He will discuss the new Wizarding Order that is upon us."

"Thanks, River." I recognized the voice of Kingsley. "It has been less than three months since the shift of power. It was quick and fast. Although we anticipated the change, I will not lie that it came as a blow to morale to not be able to stop it.

"Immediately the new Ministry issued the Muggleborn Registration Act. This was nothing more than a bag and tag method to imprison the Muggleborn. We salute those who have been harboring runaways and smuggling them to safety.

"Speaking of Muggleborns, I'd like to report that all the families that escaped from the Ministry at the beginning of September have reached safety in other countries.

"To the new regime, it is Pureblood first. To many others, it is Wizards first. To me, it must be all humans first, but I'd like to take that one step further and ask everyone to befriend and protect all magical species. It is imperative that we have all the willing help we can get.

"Speaking of which, it is confirmed that Gringotts is no longer under the control of the Goblins. Several of the creatures, including well-known and respected Griphook and Garnuk, put up a fight and are now on the run. This proves the war is no longer simply a Wizard's war."

"Never a truer word, Royal," Lee said. "Are you still bashful about that Minister position when this whole thing blows over?"

"One step at a time, River."

"We now move over to Romulus for our 'Pals of Potter' feature," Lee said.

"Thanks, River," the voice of Lupin said. "Harry Potter has remained out of sight but not out of mind. Since his supposed break-in at the Ministry, there has been no news of his whereabouts. I feel that no news right now is the best news. I am convinced that The-Boy-Who-Live is indeed alive and working hard to help us all."

"Is that Professor Lupin?" Lavender whispered. I nodded.

“Although the Daily Prophet has obviously been compromised, there are beacons of truth. Surprisingly, that beacon has come from Xenophilius Lovegood, editor of the Quibbler...”

“Oh good,” Luna said. “We’re getting publicity!”

“...a full Support-Harry-Potter publication.”

“How long will they allow such journalism to continue?” Lee asked Lupin.

“I don’t know, River,” Lupin admitted. “I can only imagine that it won’t be long, but I will show as much support as I can to the man. My copy is in the mail.”

“And what of our younger friends at Hogwarts?” Lee asked.

“A large number of students have banded together and have stood up to the Death Eaters at the school...”

Several cheers came from our group.

“...tried to steal the Sword of Gryffindor from the office of Severus Snape. They were unsuccessful and we fortunately have no deaths to report. Although we applaud their bravery, we urge them to not to risk their lives in such ways.”

Neville grinned.

“Thank you, Romulus,” Lee said. “Please welcome one of the men that had made this possible, Raphael...”

“Thanks, River!”

I laughed aloud and recognized the voice of my brother George.

“Where is You-Know-Who? What is he doing? Does he like his tea with one lump or two? There is very little to be said about the Chief Death Eater because he has remained in the shadows. A lot of rumors are circulating and one of them is that he can fly. Regrettably, that one is a true.

"And if you don't know, then you most likely haven't ever called You-Know-Who by his proper title. His name is jinxed, tabooed, so unless you want to alert every Death Eater or Snatcher in a 100 kilometer radius, we suggest you keep calling him You-Know-Who. How about it, Royal?"

"I still have the scars to prove it," Royal replied.

"Listeners," Lee said. "This brings us the end of our first broadcast. Does anyone else have anything else to add?"

George spoke up. "Little Red misses her Green-Eyed Toad."

I smiled. *Thanks, George*, I thought. Luna squeezed my hand affectionately.

"I'm sure she does," Lee agreed. "We should be broadcasting the same time next week. The password will be Dumbledore. Keep each other safe: keep faith. Good night."

Static took over and I turned the wireless off.

"That was brilliant," Coote said, standing up, flipping his newly acquired coin into the air. "It's nice to hear the truth for once."

"You don't know what it's really like," Demelza said, looking around at us original members of the DA. "You stick close to each other, and rightfully so, because you can't be sure who to trust, so you don't really know what it's like."

"What do you mean?" Seamus asked.

"They are brainwashing us," Summerby answered. "You've been to the classes. Anyone with any kind of doubt about their own principles is being swayed easily."

"The Carrows and Snape may be hated for their cruelty, but that's not stopping the students from thinking *some* of what is being taught makes sense," Sarah said.

Neville stood up and paced the room for several seconds. He stopped, looking at each of us one by one, silently pleading. "What can we do?" he asked us.

"We can be a beacon of truth," Terry replied, emulating Lupin's words. "Stand up and proclaim loud and clear what's going on and what we know."

"And then we're dead?" Michael said loudly. "And then we're no good to anyone."

"We could start our own underground newspaper," Parvati suggested. "We could report what the *Quibbler* is reporting."

"Beacon of truth," Neville muttered, considering the options. He frowned, looked at Luna, and smiled. "How does your dad deliver the magazine?"

Luna looked delighted. "Owls, of course. We have a whole flock of them in our backyard. I've even named each one, except the newest one. Daddy named him Oghma."

"Do you think he would be willing to send several hundred copies to the school?" Neville asked.

"I don't think Oghma makes those decisions, but I suppose we could ask him," Luna replied, scratching her chin. "Although I don't think he speaks either."

I chuckled. Several people looked uncomfortable, not knowing how to take Luna.

Neville couldn't stop grinning either. "Not the owl, your dad."

Luna beamed. "He would be delighted. I'll send him a message with my Patronus."

"You can do that?" I asked her in surprise.

“Yes,” she answered, her eyes twinkling as she cast her silver hare towards the door and watched it jump away and out of the room. “I’ve been practicing.”

The following morning, Xenophilius outdid himself. When the morning post came, a flock of owls invaded the Great Hall, dropping copy after copy of the *Quibbler* upon the laps of students. We feared that so many birds would leave quite the mess.

I grabbed a magazine and smiled at the cover. Harry’s face, with his recognizable glasses and the prominent scar, stared back up at me. The headline read “Support Harry Potter” in large, shimmering green letters. I held it up and showed Luna, who was sipping pumpkin juice and looking pleased with herself.

The Carrows attempted in vain to seize all copies of the publication, but classes had begun. A good number of students lost their copies, but most left breakfast with their copy still hidden.

Snape, following another of Umbridge’s decrees, banned the *Quibbler* from the school. Needless to say, people were reading the truth and we, the members of the DA, were blamed for it, but since no proof could pin us down, punishment was less severe. Snape took away the rest of the DA’s allowance into Hogsmeade.

“Ginny, I don’t want to hear it anymore,” Neville said.

I had latched onto Luna’s idea that Snape might be protecting us. Once again, I had been questioned his motives with Neville and Luna. “Don’t you think it’s strange though?” I asked.

“We’ve been over this,” Neville said. He looked annoyed until Luna placed her hands on his shoulders from behind, rubbing a knot out his back. Neville calmed.

“Don’t you think it’s a fascinating idea, Neville?” Luna said, her eyes sparkling. “I’ll bet Daddy will write a story about it.”

“See, Neville,” I said, not meeting his satisfied look. I had noticed the attraction between my two friends, but neither one seemed to be making any significant advances. Perhaps they were like Ron and

Hermione. Shaking my desire for Harry's strong arms, I said goodnight to them.

Angerona had begged me to start teaching her how to defend herself. I was convinced that doing so was the only way I could help her. We would sneak to the Room of Requirement once a week where I would teach her the spells that Harry had taught me and also a few of my own specialties. She especially loved the Bat-Bogey Hex.

Two days before Halloween, we had been practicing for the second time. She was having great difficulty with Disarming me and she refused to accept that I'd take it easy on her. She threw her wand to the floor and huffed over to the corner.

"I can't do it," she said.

"Ang, it's only been your second day of me teaching you and only your second month in this school," I said, trying to comfort her.

"I don't learn anything useful here," she replied. "Amycus is teaching us how to control each other. Alecto has divided us up based on how much magical blood we have. I want to go home..."

"Me, too," I said. "But a friend of mine said to me earlier this month that my place is here, standing between the students and the evil that controls this school. You could be a beacon of hope for some of your fellow first years."

"They won't listen to me," she replied. "I've made two friends. You..." she smiled at me. "...and Simon. He's in Ravenclaw." Her eyes danced a bit when she said his name.

"Is there a bit of love in the air?" I asked, poking her shoulder playfully.

"No," she said, turning red. "We're just friends..."

I shrugged. "Give it a couple years, Ang. You'll both be head over heels for each other."

As if on cue, two more people had entered the Room. With a quick flash, I had my wand pointed towards the door only to find the

handsome face of Michael Corner and none other than little Simon walking through the entrance.

Michael was just as attractive as I remembered him to be, but when I saw him this time, I felt no romance whatsoever. He was just eye candy, something nice to look at, but nothing worth touching. He greeted me with that smile that used to melt my heart. *The first boy to tell me he loved me*, I thought.

Simon was excited to see Angerona. His dark black hair was past his shoulder and I imagined that in a few short years, he'd be just as handsome as his mentor and catching a lot of the young ladies' eyes. In fact, judging by how red Angerona had turned when he walked in, I'd say he had already caught one set.

"I heard you were teaching her some defensive magic," Michael said, nodding towards Angerona. "I figured I'd start doing the same with Simon. We were hoping to catch the two of you here."

Simon and Angerona walked over to the other side of the room towards the bean bag chairs. They each took one and began talking in low voices. I looked back at Michael and felt the awkwardness take control of the situation.

"For what it's worth," Michael started, not faltering, keeping eye contact., "I get it now. I know it's taken me two years to say it, but I understand why you were angry with me. I'm sorry. I know it's too late."

That was the last thing I expected to be talking to him about. "Michael, there are bigger things to be worried about right now," I said. "I'm not mad at you. Just make up for it by keeping up what you're doing."

"Cho and I broke up," Michael said. "We both decided that we were too preoccupied with factors from our past." He eyed me curiously.

I felt uncomfortable when I guessed what those past factors might be. "I'm waiting for Harry," I said softly. I looked over at Angerona and she smiled at me. I motioned for her to follow and she said goodbye to Simon. I looked back at Michael.

"We're going to call it a night. Have fun practicing."

"Simon thinks you're beautiful," Angerona said when we left the Room beneath my Cloak. "I think he fancies you."

"I'm sorry, Ang," I said, following my Patronus back to the Tower.

"It's okay," she said. "I told him you're too old for him. And then I told him you're in love with Harry Potter. He said I was crazy and that he didn't like you."

I smiled, remembering how I had originally acted when I saw Harry. I denied it for a full two years to myself. "What's with his long hair?" I asked. It reminded me of Charlie before Mum forced him to chop it all off before the wedding.

"Family tradition," she answered. "They think that the longer their hair is, the more control they have over their magic. Simon doesn't believe that. He does it just to honor the family. I like it. I think he looks handsome..." If I could see her face, I knew it would have been red.

On Halloween night, Michael shoved his way into the Common Room. It was an hour before the feast and Neville, Luna, and I were enjoying each other's company. Michael looked frantic.

"They took him," he said.

"What are you talking about?" Neville asked.

"Simon," Michael said. He explained how Simon had been caught with a copy of the *Quibbler* he had given the First Year. "Alecto took him to the dungeons. She's going to leave him down there for two days.... No food.... No light..."

"Solitary confinement." I gulped. Draco had mentioned it earlier that week, about how the Carrows were trying this new method of punishment.

"I'm going to free him," Michael said coldly. His eyes swam with anger and his jaw clenched. He was trembling; his fist was clenched. He looked stressed, which was a far cry from how he usually looked.

"We'll help you," Luna said.

"No," Michael replied. "If we all don't show up at the feast, they'll notice quicker. One person missing is not going to be detected as fast. I'm going alone."

"No," Neville said.

"Who made you leader?" Michael shouted, his eyes ablaze. "It wasn't a question, Longbottom. Simon is down there because of me. I'm not risking anyone else."

"What are you trying to prove?" I asked.

Michael breathed heavily. "Maybe the same thing you were trying to prove by stealing the Sword," he said. "If you try to follow me, I *will* hex you." He pointed his wand around at every one of us.

Neville sighed, shrugging in defeat. "I want to help, but if you won't accept, I trust you. Swear to me though that you can handle this alone."

Michael didn't hesitate. "I swear."

Hours later, after the feast, Luna and Padma found Michael at the bottom of the Ravenclaw spiral staircase, bloodied and beaten close to death. They took him to Madam Pomfrey.

The following morning, I visited Michael with Angerona. His face was black and blue, his arm was in a sling, and several abrasions were slowly healing all over his body.

Angerona stiffened against my body when we walked in. I didn't want her to see it, but she insisted, saying she wanted to visit the man who tried to save *her* Simon. I expected tears, but the girl was strong.

Michael stirred when he heard us come in. He leisurely opened his eyes and greeted us with a hard smile. Through the grin, I knew he was in large amounts of pain. "Hello, girls," he said weakly. "I guess I could have used the help."

“Neville thinks it won’t be long before they stop allowing Madam Pomfrey to treat our wounds,” I said quietly, finding a seat and sitting close to Michael’s head. Angerona pulled up a seat next to me.

“That makes sense,” Michael whispered. “Why go through all the spells and torture if we’re just going to get healed up?” He groaned as he repositioned himself. “Looks like we might need to steal medical supplies. Isn’t Ernie studying to be a healer?”

I nodded.

“I bet you want to know how Simon is,” Michael said, motioning towards Angerona. She nodded eagerly. “He was fine when I got in there, told me that I was an idiot for coming in after him, that he could handle two days in the dark.”

Angerona smiled in a mixture of amusement and sadness. “Did they hurt him?” she asked, digging her hand into her pockets and gripping her wand.

Michael shook his head in the slowest way possible. “No,” he replied. “They didn’t hurt him... but...”

“What?” Angerona demanded.

“They shaved his head...” Michael answered. “Really injured his pride... kid said he wouldn’t mind getting tortured... I swear it, he should have been Sorted into Gryffindor.”

I rolled my eyes. “Michael, we’ve agreed as a group that we can’t expect anyone else to do what you did,” I said.

“You didn’t ask me,” Michael whispered.

“I know,” I said. “Be that as it may, Sarah and Demelza have already handed their coins back in. After the Sword and the stunt with the magazines, they’re not going to let us off easy anymore. You,” I motioned at his whole body, “are proof of that.”

Michael closed his eyes and nodded apprehensively, as if every part of his body was on fire. “I need to sleep,” he said.

November was relatively quiet when it came to our rebellion. For the time being, we had no goals to accomplish and the Death Eaters had no punishments to dish out. We worked silently, trying to casually make conversation with students to find out the general consensus.

I joined Luna's side in the Potions classroom. Both of us had received an "exceeds expectations" on the OWL exams for Potions last year. We couldn't talk freely anywhere since most of our classes had at least one Slytherin NEWT student in them, instead we discussed her father's magazine.

Professor Slughorn sauntered in and greeted me with a pat on the shoulder. "Excellent essay, Miss Weasley, on Amortentia. I couldn't ask for a better one," he said. "You've shown a real knack for potions. It seems that Harry has rubbed off on you."

I shifted uncomfortably in my seat. Harry hadn't exactly been working on talent alone when it came to his potion making abilities. The Half-Blood Prince, also known as our new Headmaster, had been assisting him. I simply nodded in agreement.

"When I was in my prime, I gave out awards for talent," Slughorn said, twirling his moustache in his fingers. "I wonder if I should start that back up."

"Why did you stop?" I asked.

"Near the end of my career, I was forced to cease," Slughorn answered. "Something about favoritism... don't know what they're talking about."

He held up a finger and walked to his desk. He rummaged through several drawers and pulled out a dusty scrapbook. He placed the book in front of me and opened to a page. A younger version of my mother looked up at me. "Molly was especially gifted in the line of potions. Top marks in her fifth year," he said, grinning. "In fact, your mother was quite the dueler in her day as well."

"Really?" I asked surprised. I never pictured my mother as a fighter. She always stayed at home during the dangerous missions and

waited, worrying about her family. I couldn't picture my Mum casting defensive and offensive spells.

Flipping through the book, I stopped at the end. On the last page that was used, I saw the beautiful face of Lily Evans looking up at me. Beside her stood a greasy-haired, hooked-nose young man. If I didn't know any better, I would swear it was Snape.

"Severus and Lily, yes," Slughorn replied. "Always the top of the class. They got the same grade in their third year." He pointed towards the photograph. "I think he taught her everything she knew... It's a pity..." he trailed off, a glassy look entering his eyes.

"It looks like they were friends," Luna said, peaking over my arm at the scrapbook.

Slughorn regained his composure and cleared his throat. His portly hands closed the book and picked it up, but lost grip of it. Falling to the table in a loud bang, several photographs scattered. Luna and I gathered them together and handed them back to our teacher.

"Thank you, girls," he said. "I... I need to update the sticking charms on the book... yes..."

He stored the scrapbook back inside his desk and pointed his wand to the board. The instructions for the Protermortis potion appeared on the board. "This is today's assignment," Slughorn said, his face looking worried.

"Professor," Luna said, "isn't that potion highly dangerous?"

Slughorn's face flushed and he replied, "What? Oh... yes... I suppose it is." He took his seat at his desk and shuffled through some of the papers that were stacked there.

"Why are we making such a dangerous potion?" Luna asked.

Slughorn pretended not to hear her and when she asked again, he looked up from his feigned work. "Miss Lovegood, you shouldn't be concerned as to why we are making it. It is for a grade..."

“Proptertermortis causes people to be close to death but not to die. Death would be preferable to many,” Luna said.

I would have rolled my eyes, but I knew Luna was stating fact. When it was something that was based more in fantasy, she usually would say that her father told her.

“*They* asked you to make it,” Luna said, referring to the Carrows. “Why are you listening to them?”

Not to mention the look on Slughorn’s face indicated that she was right.

He stood up and came closer to her so no one else but me could hear. “Now see here, Miss Lovegood,” he whispered, his voice shaking, “I have a job to do. I do not have time to worry about such things...”

“Such as doing what is right?” I asked.

“You wouldn’t understand,” Slughorn replied.

“We’ve made our choice,” I said confidently indicating myself and Luna. “We know where our allegiances lie. Do you?”

Slughorn faltered in his answer. “It is not so easy, young lady,” he said. He opened my textbook to the appropriate page in which the potion was on. “Please stop talking to me and do your work.”

Luna and I both shook our heads.

“With all due respect, Professor,” I said, “you might as well fail us for this assignment and keep your ingredients. If you force me to make it, I *will* sabotage my work.”

“Oh!” Luna said, her head nodding in agreement. “You could send us to detention. I haven’t been there for a few weeks.”

Slughorn did not send us to detention nor did he force us to brew the potion. “Very well,” he muttered. “You failed today. Faulty potions, right?”

"If you wanted to do what was right, all the potions made today would be faulty," I said

Our words only seemed to worry the man even more. He returned to his desk and did not say anything else until he dismissed the class later. One by one, my classmates brought their vials of the black shimmering liquid and placed them on his desk. When Luna and I exited, I saw him giving the potions a weary and defeated look.

For the Dark Arts class, we had reviewed many horrible curses and the DA members had refused to use any of them for practice. In November, we had reached the Imperius Curse, where Amycus expected us to use it on each other.

We refused. Out of principle alone, we had not touched our Dark Arts books. Before Christmas break, most of the DA had decided that Dark Arts was not a class we wanted to take anymore. We stopped attending. Amycus sent anyone that had skived off classes to detention.

Luna, Neville, and I were chained to our chairs in the dungeons. We would not give anyone the satisfaction of begging. We could hope that one of our own would be assigned to torture us, but they had long ago given up sending us down here to do so. It would only result in the release of whomever we were sent to torture.

The trio of Crabbe, Goyle, and Malfoy came into the room. Malfoy proceeded to the wall and leaned cockily against the stone. Crabbe and Goyle licked their lips in anticipation as if the desire to inflict pain had become a venereal one. They lifted their wands and pointed it towards the three of us, mockingly shifting from me, to Neville, to Luna, and back again.

Goyle smirked and, without saying a word, unlatched Neville's shackles and stood him up forcibly beside him. "You can go... if you torture the blond one."

Neville shook his head without hesitation.

"Not Loony enough for you?" Crabbe asked.

"Couple of hours with us and she'll have a bed right next to your parents," Goyle replied.

And before anyone could laugh, Neville was upon them both, releasing punches and kicks. "If you touch her, I'll kill you!" he shouted.

The words of encouragement were screamed from both of us but the duo of Crabbe and Goyle was too overpowering for Neville. They restrained him and threw him to the floor. Goyle used a cutting curse and sliced his cheek open, spraying blood on the already grimy floor.

I looked away from the gruesome scene as the boys continued to throw punches and kicks. I stared at Draco, fury running through my gaze, and hatred sent to him with my thoughts. How could he just stand there and watch?

Luna was crying, her tears coming down her cheeks in streams, the tracks of the water glistening upon her skin. I continued my death stare at Draco, screaming obscenities that would make Mum cringe.

Neville had lost consciousness but Crabbe continued to torture him. Crabbe stopped, pointed his wand at me, and yelled, "*Crucio!*" I felt the agony pulsate through my body and after several minutes, I blacked out.

I awoke peacefully. The familiar ceiling of the hospital wing brought me back to reality. The memories of the previous night flashed through my head, the torture that Crabbe and Goyle had performed and Draco just standing there watching. I blinked, trying to blot out the anger I had towards the Slytherins. I had spared Draco from torture once. He hadn't been man enough to return the favor.

"Thanks for sticking up for me, Neville," Luna's voice came from my right. In my peripheral vision, I could see the Ravenclaw girl sitting at the edge of Neville's bed, stroking the damaged skin of our leader and dabbing dittany in his wounds. "I find that I would rather have people defend me. It's much more satisfactory than them stealing my socks."

He nodded appropriately.

"You didn't have to," Luna said. "Because you saved me, your cheeks..." her hand brushed over the gash in his face and he flinched.

"Scars will fade," Neville muttered, his eyes glassing over. "But losing you would not."

I felt embarrassed to be lying there, listening to Neville reveal his feelings, but I couldn't interrupt him now. I closed my eyelids partially and watched through my lashes.

"You like me a lot," Luna said.

Neville didn't answer. It wasn't a question. The only real inquiry that mattered now to him was whether or not she felt the same way. He didn't look sheepish about the situation. That was the new Neville I had grown to admire.

Luna smiled at his silence, but her gaze went skyward towards one of the Christmas decorations above Neville's bed: mistletoe. How it got there, I don't know, but I had a sneaking suspicion that a certain poltergeist had been in while we were asleep.

"Mistletoe," she said.

"You should take it down, Luna," Neville said quietly. "We don't want Nargles to affect us while we're sleeping."

"You're silly." She touched Neville's arm. "Nargles can't do anything to you while you sleep." She peered again at the mistletoe. "Did you know that there's a Christmas tradition about kissing beneath mistletoe? Harry and Cho did it back in the Room of Requirement."

My insides clenched, but I scolded myself. *You won his heart in the end*, I thought.

"I hear kissing is really nice," Luna continued in her notoriously innocent way. "Ginny really likes it, at least." Her eyes repositioned themselves on Neville's face. "I don't suppose we should break traditions. It might bring us years of bad luck."

Neville dared not move or breathe as if the words that were being spoken and the actions that might take place had a direct connection. He swallowed heavily, hoping she would stop talking and relieve him of this torture she performed without the aid of a wand.

"It would be your first kiss," Luna said thoughtfully. Without much warning, she bent closer to Neville's face. "That's okay. It's my first time, too."

She closed the gap and I looked away. There was only so much eavesdropping I would do that I considered ethical. Watching my friends kiss was not one of them (and don't scold me for watching Harry and Cho lock lips. I was in a state of shock and I couldn't move).

"You can stop pretending you're asleep now," Neville said when Luna left.

I sat up in the bed and felt all my muscles ache. Unfortunately, repeated exposure to the Cruciatus Curse does not ease the pain associated with it. With a teasing smile on my face, I turned towards him and asked, "*Have* you liked her for a long time?"

Neville nodded. "You know how observant she is," he replied. "We spent most of our time together last year, but with Dumbledore's death and You-Know-Who taking over and our rebellion, there just seemed to be more important things to worry about than whether or not she shared my feelings."

"You Gryffindors and your nobility."

Neville shrugged.

"So was that...?" I pointed to the mistletoe and back to Neville, hoping that my two closest friends had found love in the midst of such heartache.

"I don't know."

"She kissed you."

"There was mistletoe."

“Are you telling me you let her walk away without finding out how she felt?”

This time, Neville did look sheepish and ashamed. “I guess I did,” he said, straightening up. He furrowed his brow and looked lost in thought. “I... I’ll ask her on the train ride home tomorrow.”

I was released from the hospital wing that night. A mixture of emotions ran through my body. I was excited that Neville and Luna might become an item, but I was feeling lonely about it, too, though the strongest emotion I was feeling was one of raw hatred for Draco.

The morning we were to leave for Christmas break, I found him alone in the hallways. Before I could think about it, I had the Slytherin against the wall with rage in my eyes.

“What do you think you were doing?” I hissed. “Crabbe and Goyle could have killed Neville!”

Draco pushed me back forcibly and straightened his clothing where I had grabbed him. With a smug look on his face, he said, “Let’s get something straight, Weasley. Our arrangement has nothing to do with me protecting you or your friends from punishment.”

“You sat there and let it happen,” I said, “after I refused to torture you months ago!”

“That was your prerogative,” Draco sneered. “You wanted knowledge from me. In exchange, you said you’d help me when I needed it.” His eyes flashed a great disdain for me. “I don’t like you. I don’t like Longbottom. I don’t like very many people right now. But I’ll do what it takes to keep me and my family safe”

I let out an angry rush of air from my lungs. “I thought maybe you had changed.”

“Changed?” Malfoy laughed. “Into what? *The good side?*” He laughed louder this time. “If there’s one thing the Dark Lord has taught me worth anything, it’s that morality is only dictated by whoever is in charge.”

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Did he really not care who won this war as long as his goals were met? Had he made the deal to ensure that he and his family would be off the hook if Voldemort was defeated?

"What's wrong, Weasley? Rethinking our little arrangement?" he asked. He raised his hand and touched a little piece of my hair that was on my face.

I wrenched away. "There will come a time when you'll have to choose sides, Malfoy. You can't be stuck in the middle for ever. You want *him* defeated as much as I do."

His lip curled up at the truthfulness of my statement. "Then what the hell is Potter waiting for?" he hissed. He turned to leave with a quickening force.

Several feet away, he stopped and cringed, and pulled something from his pockets. I expected his wand but it was something rolled up. He turned back to me, and said, with every word looking like it was causing him pain, "Keep an eye on your friends today." He tossed the object to me.

I caught it. Unrolling the paper, I was looking at the *Quibbler*. The front page showed Harry's face and the title "Show Support to The Boy-Who-Lived." Although I wanted to question Draco more, he was already at the end of the hallway and I was left alone to ponder his odd actions.

His words didn't make any sense until after it happened. Luna had gone to the toilet soon after we boarded the train, but she didn't return. The DA searched through the corridors but we found no sign of our Ravenclaw friend.

Exiting the train, Neville and I met up with Xenophilius. He stood there in an elaborately decorated parka. "Hello, children," he greeted, pulling the strings of his coat to make it tighter. "It is always in good fortune to dress..."

"We think they took Luna," Neville said, cutting him off.

Xenophilius's face flushed and he dropped the strings of his coat. "My... my Luna..." he muttered. "But... I told them..."

"You knew they were going to take her?" I shouted.

"They said they would leave her alone if I cooperated..." he whispered, Apparating away before there was another chance for us to speak.

Neville let out a string of curses and swears that I didn't know he was capable of using. I placed a hand on his shoulder and told him not to worry.

Christmas break was not what I had expected it to be. I was desperately hoping for a real break from all the troubles of school, not to exit the train and have to be worried sick about my friend. I had even hoped that the Trio would be home in time for Christmas or at least stopped their search for a quick visit.

I imagined waking up on Christmas morning only to find them sitting beside the tree, smiling at me, maybe with bows on their heads signifying that I had received the best Christmas present I could ever receive.

Christmas, to say the least, was a sad one. Fred and George bought me a kit to update the charms on my Cloak. It was the five of us, Mum, Dad, Fred, George, and me. Bill and Fleur had decided to spend their first Christmas in their new place. (If I had known they were hiding Ron for walking out on Harry and Hermione, I would have visited and punched him in the face, the *git*.)

The day before I went back to school, I was sitting alone in the kitchen, reviewing several Transfiguration notes. If you had asked me, I would have claimed boredom, but the truth was I needed the distraction. I hadn't seen Harry, Ron, or Hermione for almost a half-year, the longest I had ever gone not seeing them, and since it was the holiday season, I was feeling especially lonely.

The wireless on the counter was on low, playing some kind of song, but I wasn't listening to it. Instead, I heard my parents descending from the stairs.

“Molly, it’s only a matter of time,” Dad said before I saw him. “Right now, we’re safe, but I don’t know long they’ll put up with us. You know we’re Blood Traitors.”

“I know, Arthur,” she said softly. “But this is our house... and poor Ronnie... He won’t know where we are. I wish he would send us a message...”

They entered the kitchen and looked at me. Dad smiled softly and touched my shoulder. He kissed Mum goodbye, exited the house, and, with a crack, Apparated away.

“I’m sorry you had to hear that,” Mum said, sitting across from me and gripping one of my hands in hers. “It’s not my wish for my children to be burdened with so much.”

“It’s too late for that, Mum,” I replied, taking my free hand and closing the Transfiguration book. “None of us are really safe, are we?”

“You would be if you weren’t running around Hogwarts causing mischief,” she replied, giving me that notorious look. “I don’t want to see you hurt.”

I’m glad that the twins had done their part in downplaying my troubles. I dared not tell her how bad it really was. If she knew, she wouldn’t let me return and I *needed* to return. It was the only place I could make a difference.

“You know, Mum,” I said, attempting to change the subject, “Professor Slughorn mentioned you used to be quite the dueler.”

She repositioned herself, trying to hide the pride in her stance. “Yes, your mother is not only good for making one mean treacle tart.” She smiled coyly. “Having seven children doesn’t call for much dueling though.”

“Mum, you raised Fred and George.”

Mum laughed. “I guess I did.”

The wireless crackled. Although we needed a newer one, I still heard through the static, "...no recent news on apprehending Harry Potter for questioning. If anyone has any information of his whereabouts, you are urged to contact the Ministry..."

I must have looked worried as the static returned to the wireless because Mum took my hand. "I'm proud of you, Ginny. There aren't many girls your age who would wait so long for someone. Harry is a lucky man. I personally cannot wait to see you wearing Aunt Muriel's tiara."

I looked at her in surprise, perplexed at what she was suggesting. "You do know you just hinted that you approve of Harry and me getting married." I came closer to her and I whispered, "Who are you and what did you do to my mother?"

"What mother wouldn't approve of her daughter marrying Harry Potter?" she asked. "He has proven himself more than worthy. Of course, you have to wait until you're out of school."

I couldn't think of such things. All I could worry about right then was Harry's safe return to us all. He was going to win this war first and then we would get back together and then we would worry about marriage. I sighed. "It's hard, Mum. He wanted me to be safe, but I'm not."

Mum agreed. "I know James never had a chance to really raise Harry, but if I didn't know any better, I'd swear he raised that boy himself."

"What do you mean?"

She reached across the table and stroked my hair. "The Potter men and their love for redheads for one. Their fierce loyalty to their friends, their passion for the people they love, their attempts to protect the women in their lives..."

"Did James try to protect Lily like Harry is with me?"

Mum nodded. "Right after graduation, they joined the Order. After a run in with You-Know-Who and his Death Eaters, James came out

looking like a hero, but also a new target for the Dark Lord. James broke up with her to keep her safe.”

I suddenly felt a strong connection to Lily as I never had before. “But she wasn’t safe,” I said, thinking of the close correlation between me and Harry’s Mum.

Mum eyed me closely, understanding how I might have been interpreting the words. “Harry’s situation with you is not the same as James and Lily,” she said. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “James came to his senses two weeks later.”

She was right. It was different, but yet so similar.

“Remus mentioned he dropped off some of their things,” Mum said, pondering the thought. “Why don’t you fetch that box? I’d like to see them.”

I hurried to the attic, hearing the ghoul in the pyjamas moan as I passed by Ron’s room. I quickly located the box and heaved it into my arms. Less than five minutes later, I was seated again at the table.

Mum picked up the top yearbook, the earliest, and began to search through it, pausing on pages and smiling. She occasionally would make a noise of sadness or happiness, reaching to her eye and wiping the tears that had formed.

I took each book out, one by one, and stacked them on the table. When I reached the bottom, I saw a book I had obviously missed the first time around. It was smaller than and not as thick as the others, colored black, and what felt like a dragon skin cover. On the front, green letters shimmered, reading, “*The Diary of Lily A. Evans.*”

I hesitated, hating as I did the sight of diaries. They still make me nervous and I’m sure no one could blame me if they knew my history. Shaking the feeling, I opened to the first entry.

James had been acting strange since the battle. I thought it might have been the trauma of having to kill someone, but that wasn’t it. It was him being concerned about me. He was worried that since he

was being praised, I would become a target. I should have seen it coming.

He said he couldn't live with himself if I died and it was because they were trying to get to him through me. He said he couldn't bear to lose me like that, so instead he breaks up with me and loses me in a completely different way. I was silent even though he was wrong. I'm not safe, but who really is?

I haven't had the courage yet to tell everyone the wedding is canceled. I've been a mess. I haven't been eating. I haven't been sleeping. We once said that we couldn't live without the other, and I'm feeling that way right now, and I know he's feeling the same way.

I'll wait for him until he's done being noble.

I stopped reading at that point. The tears were streaming down my cheeks. I wanted desperately to talk to Lily, to meet the woman who would have been my mother-in-law, who I might have stayed up late with, talking, laughing, drinking hot tea or cocoa. I wanted to let her know that I understood how she felt and then we could scold ourselves for being so in love with the Potter boys.

"They were already engaged," I whispered.

Mum looked up and noticed the diary. She nodded. "But like I said, James came to his senses two weeks later, and two weeks after that, they were married." She asked if she could examine the diary before I went further and I handed it to her.

If Lily were alive, if James were alive, then Harry would not have to be off risking his life. If... if Voldemort were dead, all these people could finally be liberated. The dead could have their rest. The living could have their life.

Mum handed the diary back to me. "I thought this was one of those," she said. "At certain points, you can actually enter a memory that Lily added to the page. It's very much like a Pensieve."

I turned to the second page which was entitled, "*The Day James and I Fell in Love.*" It wasn't a long entry, just a few sentences, and a small square near the bottom.

I usually use this memory to conjure my Patronus, but Mad-Eye had to save me last night from the dementors. I can't seem to find that happy memory when I hurt so much.

The square lit up and showed a winter scene, almost as if I were watching a Muggle television set. As Mum smiled at me, I held the page close to my eyes to see closer, and before I realized it, I was falling forward through the frame, faster and faster, in a whirlwind of color and shadow.

I hit the ground hard, but felt no pain. The snow was all over me, but I felt neither cold nor wet. This was strange, being in someone else's memory, but very interesting. I scanned the area. I was standing within the Hogwarts grounds, right beside the lake, right beneath my favorite tree. It was considerably smaller though.

"I still can't believe you talked me into this, Potter. It's freezing out here."

"Where's your sense of adventure, Evans?"

I turned to find the voices of James and Lily coming towards me. Lily was gorgeous. Her red hair reached below her shoulders and her green eyes shimmered against the winter sun. James was handsome and it was obvious where Harry had gotten his good looks from. I grinned when I noticed James's hair was messed up in the same places that Harry's always was.

Lily shivered. She hesitated when James took off his coat and offered it to her. He rolled his eyes and went behind her, slipping his coat around her shoulders, his bare hand brushing her neck ever so slightly. She shivered again from his gentle touch. I'll admit she was doing a good job at pretending she wasn't enjoying herself.

She shook her head and frowned, wrapping the coat around her tightly. "I don't understand it, Potter. Last year, you were an arrogant toerag. This year, you're actually being..."

“Charming?” James said, grinning handsomely.

“I was going to say nice, but I suppose charming could work,” she said. A cool wind shook the tree and snow flurries fell from the branches. Lily wrinkled her nose as the flakes hit her face, but since her hands were wrapped in the coat, she was unable to wipe them away.

James’s reaction was almost impulsive. His hands were there, wiping the little water crystals from her cheeks.

“Mary scolded me for coming with you today,” Lily said.

“C’mon,” James retorted, holding his hands off to the side in a questioning manner. “Am I really *that* bad?”

Lily shrugged. “Not lately.”

That answer seemed to satisfy him. He moved a little closer to the girl, but still was very hesitant to make a move. Lily tensed and I suspected that in moments passed, he had attempted to put his arm around her without permission. She looked impressed that he didn’t.

“You’ve told me so much today,” Lily said, a flirtatious look in her eyes. “Were you trying to impress me?”

James shrugged, but ultimately shook his head. Before he could say anything, Lily pointed and shouted.

“James, look!”

He marveled for a second at the use of his first name. She must have never used it before. She told him again to look and this time he did, towards a group of deer that might have wandered in from the forest. Whatever reason they were there, the scene appeared peaceful.

The four animals walked gracefully maybe twenty feet away from the couple, stopping every few feet to inspect a new noise that had alerted them. There was stag, whose antlers were majestic. There was a doe, which looked so serene, almost as if she was gliding over

the snow. Following behind them, two fawns were walking side by side.

I found myself lost in the beauty of the deer. It was calming, almost romantic. When I turned back to Lily and James, they were closer, their hands were entwined, but they seemed not to notice. I smiled. I was witnessing the creation of Harry's parents.

Lily finally looked down and noticed their hands. She turned a minor shade of pink. James noticed, too, and tried to pull away, apologizing for his rudeness, but Lily held on. Her facial expression had changed noticeably. She looked up into his eyes and wet her lips.

James leaned closer to her and they kissed for what seemed to be first time. It didn't last long and it wasn't uncomfortable to watch. James pulled away with a satisfied expression. How long had he been pursuing this girl?

"You've always been the stag looking for his doe," Lily whispered. "You finally found her." She pulled him towards her and kissed him again.

The scene faded and I was being pulled from Hogwarts and back into my kitchen. Mum was busy looking through another yearbook. I sat back in my chair, clutching the diary to my chest and pondering what I had seen.

I looked at the page again and read the word "*Patronus*." If the scene had any kind of evidence what her Patronus was, I would say it was a doe. I immediately thought about that night back in October when someone sent the Doe to save me, Coote, and Peakes.

"Mum," I said quietly and she looked up, "what shape did Lily's Patronus take?"

"A beautiful silver doe," she answered, confirming my suspicions. "No one produced them like Lily did... except maybe Dumbledore... why...? What's wrong?"

My heart skipped a beat and I tried to find the words to explain. My mind was not as daft as my vocal chords though. It raced and I

pondered thoughts that were impossible, most of them involving Lily still being alive, but that surely was ridiculous.

“Mum...” I said, explaining that night in October. She luckily didn’t overreact when I told her about the dementors. “What does this mean?”

“Are you sure you’re not mistaken it for another animal?”

“It was a doe,” I reaffirmed confidently. “Does anyone else in the Order have a doe?”

The loudest explosion interrupted our conversation and echoed through the hills around us. The Burrow shook with the deafening roar. For a second, I thought we were being attacked. Mum grabbed me and pulled her wand out from her apron, pointing it around the room, waiting for any strange movements.

“Either Ron is home and he belched,” Fred said from the stairwell, “or someone was being naughty to the Ministry.” He and George entered the kitchen with their wands drawn.

“It sounded like it came from the Lovegoods,” Mum said, looking out the window.

“On it,” George and Fred said together as they exited the room and Apparated away.

I calmed down considerably and started packing the books back into the box, thinking that looking through James and Lily’s possessions was one more thing that Harry and I could do when he returned to me. I placed the diary back inside with the yearbooks and I thought about the doe Patronus that had rescued me.

Several minutes later, Fred and George strolled back into the kitchen. I looked at them eagerly for information. “What happened?” I asked.

“Add another question to the mystery of Harry Potter,” Fred said.

George threw a copy of the *Quibbler* at me and I caught it. On it was Harry's face and the title "Undesirable Number One" and captioned with reward money.

"We saw Travers and Selwyn taking ole Xeno away," George said.

"Looks like our little friends paid the Lovegoods a visit," Fred said.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione had been in the area? I looked out the window towards the Lovegood homestead and frowned, realizing how close I had been to Harry for the first time in months. I closed my eyes and thought about holding him.

"Why were they there?" I asked.

Fred shrugged. "Maybe they found out about Luna and wanted to help Xeno..."

"...but from what it sounded like, Xeno alerted the Ministry as soon as Harry got there," George added.

I had a mixture of feelings. Luna deserved to be saved but at the expense of others? What a moral dilemma Mr. Lovegood must have been facing. What would I have done in such the same situation?

I was returning to Hogwarts the following day. Although I had placed a few of the puzzle pieces together: R.A.B., Umbridge and the locket, the Sword of Gryffindor, more than two Horcruxes... I now had more questions concerning the mystery of Harry, more than I cared to answer.

What *exactly* were the Horcruxes and how many more did Harry need to find? Why was the Trio at the Lovegoods? Who had cast the doe Patronus? Why was Snape not punishing us the same way as the Carrows? What would happen now that the New Year was upon us and we had returned from Christmas break? What new horrors would be introduced to us at Hogwarts.

Only a handful of people could answer those questions and I didn't know where they were. Looking out the window again towards the

last place they were known to be, I sighed, and asked the air, “Where are you, Harry?”

Chapter Sixteen: Mysteries Unraveled

The Quidditch pitch was covered in darkness, shadows dancing eerily against the vacant seats. Thick coarse smoke met the sky in a union of blue and black, the ash of a burning fire blotting out the sun, causing the shapes of sinister faces to be peering down upon Hogwarts.

The early January chill was erased by the heat of an inferno. Fire blazed in the center of the field as orange and yellow reflected in the eyes of the evil, representing the hell in which they were forged.

Hundreds of the Hogwarts students were lined up around the bonfire, forced to attend for fear of reprisal, each holding a handful of books that would soon meet their fiery demise. There was no need to guess which books were targeted. Only the day before, a list of publications had been posted that would have to be burned.

"The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection" by Quentin Trimble
"A History of Magic" by Bathilda Bagshot
"Hogwarts, a History" by Victor Vanholder
"Home Life and Social Habits of British Muggles" by Wilhelm Wigworthy
"A Study of Muggles" by Charity Burbage
"Quidditch Throughout the Ages" by Kennilworthy Whisp

Any book they decided would corrupt young minds was stripped from the curriculum and banned from the school. Not even the library was safe. It was purged in the silent horror of Madam Pince. If Hermione had been there, she would have had a heart attack.

An army of twenty, named after the wizard who had always protected us, stood together beneath the stands, watching the scene that was playing out. We were short one soldier, the only one of us that had been captured by the enemy, paying for the actions of her father.

I looked at the man who had become my leader. Light flickered off his solemn face as he stared towards the blaze, flames flashing in his eyes, too. They may have started a fire literally in this field, but they had not anticipated the one burning in this man. They had taken his heart when they had taken Luna.

Amycus and Alecko were now shouting demands and the line of students began shuffling by the fire, dropping the books into the flames. The Death Eaters looked more like monsters than humans, reveling in the destructions of pro-Muggle literature and propaganda.

Neville turned towards us, jerked his head towards the Pitch, and said, "Let's go." His voice was distant and the spark I had come to admire was not there. He gripped a book in his hands.

Neville stepped from the shadows of the stands and, one by one, we followed behind him. As the crowd noticed us, their lines stopped flowing and each student stared in hushed fascination. The Carrows stopped shouting and watched us come closer.

The crackling of the fire and the soft thump of our feet were the only things heard. Amycus smiled broadly, perhaps noticing the books we were carrying and assuming we were joining the festivities.

Neville paused several feet away and held his book towards them. Amycus' smile immediately dropped as Neville held the book higher so that all within range could see. As the Death Eater sneered, Neville tossed the book into the flames. And without so much as a word, the rest of the Army threw our "Dark Arts" textbooks into the blaze.

We paid dearly for that one, especially Neville, and it was the last public rebellion we staged until the Final Battle started.

Several days after, I sat with Coote and Peaks at the Gryffindor table for dinner, each of us nursing the welts of whips and the ache of curses.

Neville, who had been sent down to solitary confinement and most likely torture, entered the Great Hall. He looked horrible. His robes were torn and his face was bloodied and bruised. He still had that far away look in his eyes as he scanned the room for something. His gaze fell on us, but kept searching. I imagined him alone for hours, chained up against the cold stone, with nothing to keep him company but the thoughts of whether or not Luna was safe.

I was about to rise and greet him, but Draco passed by him, and Neville's eyes fell upon the Slytherin. They burned bright and he grabbed the back of Draco's robes, flattening him upon the Gryffindor table, spreading dishes and food everywhere.

"Where is she, you bastard?" Neville snarled, his wand pointed directly into his face as the students cleared a circle around them. Neville's grip was never as strong.

Draco's stare dared Neville to move, but then looked towards me for assistance. Instead, while teachers and Slytherins came to break it up, I cast several shield charms in a ring to obstruct anyone's path, and then performed the Muffliato charm so they could talk as loudly as they wanted.

"You are just as insane as *she* is!" Draco hissed. "They force me to take meals to her like a common house-elf! She thinks I care what a bloody Crumple-Horned Snorkack is."

Neville loosened his grip and let Draco back to his feet. "She's... she's okay then?"

Draco, without warning, withdrew his wand and blasted Neville off his feet. He stepped closer, towering over him, and said with disdain, "For now."

The shouts of students ceased as Snape broke my shield charm. He walked directly to the two boys, staring coldly from one to the other. "Longbottom, I assumed you would exercise more caution. Did you not just leave the dungeons for your stunt on Monday?"

Neville stood to his feet, holding his chest where Draco had hit him. "Yes, *Sir*."

"You will join Weasley in detention tonight with Hagrid," Snape said. When I opened my mouth to protest, he cut me off. "Did you honestly believe you were powerful enough to cast a shield I could not break?" he asked, contempt oozing from every pore of his body. "And were you ignorant enough to think I could not recognize my own spell and be unable to break that as well?"

“Severus,” said McGonagall, entering the circle, “if Miss Weasley is to be punished for protecting her fellow Gryffindor from outside retribution, then I must insist Mr. Malfoy receive the same punishment for protecting himself.”

“Very well. Dinner is over. Your detention begins... now.” He whipped around, his cloak flowing behind him, and his greasy hair waving in his wake.

Exiting the Great Hall, Neville and I silently conversed about Luna as Draco followed reluctantly behind. “Are you all right?” I asked Neville quietly.

“I am now,” he said, the distance he had been exercising slowly diminishing. “I still hate that she’s in captivity, but at least she’s alright.”

I felt a hand on my shoulder, spinning me around from behind, along with Neville. Draco stared at us with an angry expression. “You know what I don’t get?” he asked violently, poking Neville in the chest. “I have been risking my neck to help you, but I don’t get any respect.”

“Do you really think you deserve respect?” Neville questioned.

“In case you haven’t noticed, I have been keeping my end of the bargain,” Draco hissed. He dug into his pockets and pulled the coin out that I had given him. “The Carrows would love to know how your precious army is communicating. I could have easily told them by now.”

“You gave him a coin?” Neville asked, looking aghast.

I ignored him. “What’s your point, Malfoy?”

Sneering, he replied, “My point is you don’t need to rough me up to get your damn information. Keep your filthy Blood Traitor hands off me.”

“Filthy blood traitor,” I repeated, pronouncing each word with emphasis. “You really have no idea, do you?” I almost pitied the bloke.

Draco grinded his teeth and his lip curled. "Things may be in black and white in your world, Weasley, but I live in a gray existence. I'm not sure what you expect me to do. Start wearing Gryffindor colors? Make a banner for the Chosen One? Not a chance in hell."

I was going to speak, but Neville spoke up. "That girl you call insane, I love her. That girl you call Mudblood, I love her. This girl here-" he motioned towards me, "-that you call Blood Traitor, I love her. The list goes on, Malfoy, of the people I love. You-Know-Who threatens their lives and the only way for them to be safe is for him to fall. If you love your family as much as you say you do, your path forward is clear."

Draco frowned, his head vibrating from anger. Without another word, he turned from us and left, ignoring the fact he was supposed to be in detention.

"That went smoothly," I muttered, watching Draco turn the corner. I rejoined Neville in our journey to detention. "Just so you know, that coin can only communicate with mine."

"Good," Neville replied, looking relieved. "But if he rats us out..."

"I think there's hope for him," I said, explaining how Draco had been behaving each time I met with him and how he had come within inches of admitting he wanted Voldemort defeated. "He could have let you believe Luna was dead when you had him pinned on the table, but he still told you."

Neville considered it. "He looks like it hurts him to even think about helping us. I just hope that when the time comes and it really matters, he'll choose a side."

Coming to Hagrid's door, we knocked, but there was no answer. The inside was completely dark and the door was locked. No one must have informed Hagrid that we were on our way down for punishment.

"Do you think he already went into the woods?" Neville asked, looking wearily towards the Forest. "Do you remember whose night it was to go with him?"

"Anthony and Terry," I replied.

A deep moan escaped the forest on the wings of the breeze. I looked towards the shadows of the trees and back to Neville, questioning whether or not we should investigate.

Neville shrugged. "We're not supposed to..."

I laughed and said, "When have we followed the rules this year?" I tugged at his sleeve. "C'mon, aren't you curious?"

Stepping towards the Forest, the moan was carried to our ears again. On the edge of the tree line, we stood as the sun set into the horizon. The forest was dark and we plunged into the darkness, lighting our wands to guide our paths.

Wandering around, we called out for Hagrid. Several minutes of gallivanting brought us further into woods. The brush was thick and the aura of creepiness gripped our senses even more. The sound of hooves on the ground up ahead alerted us to the presence of at least one centaur.

"Show yourself!" called a voice from up ahead.

Neville and I slowly broke through the brush and entered the clearing. Faint light from the setting sun showed us the tall figure of a centaur. His bow was drawn and had an arrow aimed at my heart. I held my hands up to show that I meant no harm.

"I told the others not to show their faces here again," the centaur said. "So they send others in their place? Do you think my kind unintelligent that we would not be offended?"

"No, Sir," Neville replied, his hands raised, too. "We heard moaning. We were just investigating."

The centaur raised his bow slightly. "Perhaps you think the centaurs need Wizard assistance," he shouted. "That we can't take care of our forest?"

From the other end the field, another centaur galloped towards the first. "Ronan, the intruder has been apprehended. Do you want to see him or do you wish for us to dispose of him straightaway?"

Ronan lowered his bow and nodded. "I will deal with him, Bane. Make sure these trespassers leave." Ronan placed his bow and arrow in his quiver and galloped away, disappearing into the trees.

Bane looked at us with disdain. He pointed the way we came and said, "Leave, wizards. Your kind is not welcome here. Consider yourself lucky you were not killed."

My curiosity took control. "Bane, sir, who was the other intruder?" I thought that one of the DA members abroad had entered the forest, seeking to be allies with the Hogwarts centaurs. I hoped that they were not captured and killed.

Bane considered my question, and answered, "It does not matter, young one. Leave now."

"How can you just kill them?" I shouted, knowing I was entering dangerous territory. "They only were seeking your help."

"Seeking our help?" Bane bellowed, rearing up on his hind legs. "They did not enter the forest looking for our help. They come here, with their ideas of peace, calling us *near-human* intelligence, and demanding we register with the Ministry! You call that help!?"

I looked at Neville and back to Bane, aware of my mistaken assumption. "I'm sorry, Bane. I thought it might have been friends of ours," I said quietly. "You say the Ministry was here?"

"We refuse to be governed by their laws," Bane shouted. "And we will not join your cause. Centaurs are a proud race and live separately from your kind."

"What will you do, then, when they come for you?" Neville asked loudly.

"We will fight!" Bane answered. "And die if necessary."

"Then you will die for nothing!" Neville shouted. "Why can't you see this is not just a Wizard's war? The Wizards need your help and you're letting your selfish ideals get in the way?"

Bane had withdrawn his bow fast and Neville had his wand pointed at the centaur faster.

"You dare point your wand at me?" Bane said.

"You dare point your bow at me?" Neville asked. Sweat dripped from the tip of his nose. If he was scared, he didn't show it.

Bane peered at Neville for a long time, eyes flickering from his face to his wand and back again. Without lowering his bow nor dropping his guard, he said, "You have shown bravery beyond your years." The string tightened on his bow. "The heavens have predicted a major shift in power. The end for one is drawing nigh and it will be soon. We centaurs will not choose sides."

"You're making a mistake."

Bane raised his bow and shot an arrow past Neville's face, narrowly missing the Gryffindor. "We do not make mistakes." He pointed his finger towards the way we came. "Leave."

As the cold winter months passed, we ceased all activity that would draw attention to ourselves. Too many people were getting hurt. We didn't have the luxury of Madam Pomfrey anymore, and there's only so much students can do for the injured. Since our actions were more secret, Demelza and Sarah returned to the DA, along with a handful of other students.

We were still doing underground stuff. We stole medical supplies and clandestinely assisted the wounded the best we could. We met with students that needed counseling or convincing. We sabotaged any dangerous potions that we were forced to make.

When February arrived, Apparition lessons started. I was not allowed to learn it. In fact, any Sixth Year associated with me or Neville was banned from the lessons.

Since I had that extra free time, I spent it with Angerona in the Room of Requirement. She was a fast learner, already able to Disarm me, Neville, Michael, and several other older members of the DA. On the

grounds that she would only use it if she needed to contact me, I had finally given Ang a coin.

After a productive lesson with her, Simon, and several other First Years, we sat in the Room, ready to listen to the week's episode of Potterwatch. Unfortunately, we could only find static.

"You don't think they were captured, do you?" Lavender asked.

It was possible, of course, but Draco hadn't passed any new information to me that week, so I was convinced they were all right. "They might be relocating," I suggested.

The Army, disappointed that their favorite show was not on, slowly filed out of the room. Soon it was only Angerona, Neville, and, me. Neville looked relaxed on a bean bag chair and appeared as if he were dozing.

"Any news on your searches?" Angerona asked me.

I had resumed my search for answers since we had returned from Christmas break but the truth was that no answers were being found, at least not anything concrete. I pointed my wand at the door and cast the Muffliato charm.

"Not really," I said, summoning several books in my direction. Placing them all in front of me, I said, "The only thing that seems strange is how Snape and Lily looked like they were friends when they were younger."

Angerona grabbed a yearbook and flipped open to a marked page. It was Lily in her first year, standing next to Snape in the Potions Club. They were close to each other, laughing before the pose. "You're right," Angerona said.

"But it doesn't mean anything," I said, explaining that the friendship looked as if it just disappeared after their fifth year. "From their fifth year to their seventh, there are no more pictures that would even indicate that they knew each other."

“Didn’t Harry say that Dumbledore trusted Snape because he said he was sorry about her dying?” Angerona asked. “Do you reckon he was telling the truth?”

“Not you, too,” Neville moaned, opening his eyes and looking at the First Year. “Whatever friendship Snape and Lily had doesn’t matter anymore. Snape... killed... Dumbledore.... End of story...” He stood up and sighed. “We should head back.”

Angerona and I both stood up and gathered our things. “How’s the other search?” she whispered as we exited the Room.

I hadn’t told anyone about my search for the Horcruxes, but she was a perceptive little witch, and she most likely pieced together that I was searching for two separate things. “What other search?” I asked innocently.

“The one you don’t ever talk about,” she replied. “You wouldn’t have to sneak around looking through all those Dark Arts books if you had just kept your textbook.”

I stopped. “What did you say?”

Angerona paused beside me and frowned. She repeated herself.

I opened my mouth to continue, but nothing came out except a gasp. Widening my eyes, I called to Neville, “Take Ang back to the Common Room. I need to go to Ravenclaw.”

Rushing towards the opposite tower took very little time. I couldn’t believe I had overlooked something so simple. All the books with Horcrux information had been taken from the library by Dumbledore and were now in Hermione’s possession, that much I knew, and no amount of searching through the old collection would give me what I needed.

But that was the *old* authority in this school. The new authority of this school didn’t care what dark books were in the library... *or what dark books were being used for teaching...*

I hadn't opened my Dark Arts textbook on principle alone, but that might have been a mistake, and now I didn't even have one since I had chucked it into the fire. But there was a person who hadn't been able to get rid of her book because she had not been there with us.

Luna's textbook, I hoped, would still be in her dorm room.

I caught Michael just as he was entering the Tower, and I slipped in unnoticed beneath my cloak. Rushing into Luna's room, I threw light into the candles and searched around. On her nightstand, I found a stack of books.

I grabbed them and quickly went through each, dropping her Potions book on the floor in the process. Transfiguration, Care of Magical Creatures.... *Dark Arts*.... I opened to the glossary at the end and looked for the section "H." Running my finger down the list of topics, I stopped upon the word that had evaded my searches for months: *Horcrux*

While my hands trembled, I speedily turned the pages, fearing that if I didn't find it as soon as possible, it would be gone again and I would never discover the truth. Ignoring the paper cuts on my fingers, I settled at last on the appropriate page with detained breath.

There it was, staring back at me, defeated at last, *found at last*. Since January of the year before, it had always been just out of reach, just out of earshot, and now, finally, I would understand why the Trio had left and why they had been so secretive with their plans.

Reading over the description, I cried, the tears falling to the text book and staining the pages. I understood fully why *Magick Moste Evile* had refused to even give a brief description of what they were.

I examined myself in Luna's mirror, placing a hand against the cool glass. Part of Voldemort's soul had been inside of me. I felt sick to my stomach. With disgust in my eyes, I watched my chest rise and fall with breath, hoping that the residue of the darkest wizard had not lingered. I felt so dirty, even after all the years of being free from him.

But I'm not free, I thought. His influence was still evident all around. He had created more than one Horcrux. He had become impossible

to kill. He had become immortal. The only way to be free from Voldemort now rested in the hands of the bravest people I had ever met.

I picked up Luna's potion book from the floor and a piece of paper fell from it. I reached down and picked that up as well. I curiously looked at the photograph that had been inside Slughorn's scrapbook, the one of Lily and Snape in their third year. It must have somehow slipped into Luna's book when all the pictures scattered about. I placed it into my pocket.

It might not be necessary to state, but the nightmares were stronger than ever that night, and I finally understood why Dumbledore wanted to keep that particular piece of information from me.

The next two months flew by quickly. Both opposing sides were relatively quiet. It gave me a lot of time to ponder and think. I talked to the teachers and the staff, but no one had any answers to the Patronus mystery. The only person I thought might have the answer was Dumbledore and I wasn't about to march right into the lion's den again.

Several days before Easter break, I attended my last DA meeting. While I was exiting, Draco stood there at a statue watching me.

"Lost, Malfoy?" I asked.

Draco shook his head and gazed at me annoyingly. Leaning against the statue, he replied, "I'm not sure how you survive. It could have been anyone standing here."

"Are you showing concern for me?" I asked, in disbelief.

His lip curled as he looked away. "No," he said coldly. "I know something that might interest you." He checked the corridor nervously. He cleared his throat before continuing. "Easter break is in two days. You might want to watch your back." He was about to walk away.

I grabbed his arm and stopped him. "No, not good enough," I said. "The last time you gave information like that, I had no idea what you meant and we lost Luna. Details, Malfoy."

Draco frowned at me and straightened up, eyes boring straight into my eyes.

"There's no one here to impress," I said, motioning around the empty corridors. I held up my Cloak. "And I'm alone."

"Fine," he snarled. "The Carrows are done putting up with your rebellion. I don't know what they're planning, but it's not going to be pretty. If I were you, I'd run."

"I'm going home for Easter," I replied, "but I will pass that information along." I stared at him for an uncomfortable several seconds. Pondering, I asked, "Why is it so hard for you to do the right thing?"

"We've been over this," Draco replied. "Whatever fairy-tale fantasy you have of me suddenly developing a conscience and willingly standing against the Dark Lord is just that... *fantasy*. The quicker you accept that, the less disappointed you'll be in me."

"I don't believe that," I said, slipping the Cloak around my shoulders. "I think there's hope for you, and I think you know there is, too."

Draco was silent, breathing in the air from the hallway in a long inhale. Shaking his head slowly, he turned and disappeared into the dark corridor, leaving me alone. I placed the Cloak over my head and vanished from sight.

When I arrived at the threshold of the Gryffindor entrance, I was about to say the password when I heard the Fat Lady speaking to another portrait that we called the Blue Knight.

"I'm not sure what he wanted," the Fat Lady said.

"You shouldn't have let him in," the Blue Knight said.

"He is the Headmaster!" the Fat Lady replied. "And he had the password. On both accounts, I must listen to him. We are bound to serve the current Headmaster."

“But he made us all swear to protect the students at all costs,” the Blue Knight said. “Surely that meant even from *himself*. He doesn’t exactly have a reputation of being merciful. After Dumbledore...”

The Fat Lady let out a sob. “Do not remind me!” she wailed. “If he murders her here in her room, I will never forgive myself for letting him in tonight. Ginny is one of my favorite students.”

I stifled a gasp. Snape was in my room. I thought we had some time to consider what we were going to do. I thought I’d have time to warn the others. But why was he waiting for me?

“He hasn’t been up for years, has he?” the Blue Knight continued, oblivious to my worried feelings.

“Not for almost two decades,” the Fat Lady said. “He would have spent the night out here waiting for her if she hadn’t come out to send him away.”

“He tried to apologize,” the Blue Knight said.

“It had been coming for months, maybe even longer,” the Fat Lady replied. “Lily Evans might have been a forgiving young lady, but even she understood where Snape was headed.”

I pulled off my Cloak and the Fat Lady gasped. “Ginny!” she cried.

“Beetle eyes,” I muttered, considering what I had just heard. When she wouldn’t open, I said it again, more forcibly.

“He is waiting for you, Ginny. I can’t...”

“I won’t go into my room,” I said. “I’ll come right back. I just need to tell Neville something. Please.”

The Fat Lady reluctantly allowed me through and I raced to Neville’s room. Rushing in, I shook him awake. “Neville,” I hissed. “Wake up now!”

Neville sat up, eyes wide, gripping his wand. He must have slept with it these days. “Ginny?” he asked groggily. “What’s wrong?”

I quickly told him what Draco had passed on to me and that Snape was waiting for me in my room. "I have to run," I thought wildly. "If Harry comes here, make sure you get a message to me. Take care of Angerona." I hugged him tightly and rushed out the room, wondering if he thought it was a dream.

Rushing away from Gryffindor Tower, I had no idea where I was running. With my cloak trailing behind me like a banner in my hand, I didn't know what to do. Could I escape the castle in the middle of the night? Could I make it back to my house safely? Could I....

No more wondering. A flash of light had shot across my path, shattering the rock of the wall. I stopped dead in my tracks, looked to the side, and found Alecto Carrow staring at me. She raised her wand to strike again and I quickly put up a shield.

"Damn girl!" she screamed when the spell rebounded, missing her face by inches.

Without thinking, I threw the Cloak over me and ran. Turning a corner, I felt one of the spells rip through the bottom of the Cloak and my calf burned. Moving faster, I felt a trickle of warm blood on my leg. I stopped, throwing the Cloak off, and whipped myself around to face the corner I had just come from.

Wand raised, I waited for Alecto to follow. Instead, I felt cold inside, starting from deep within and flowing through all of my extremities. I heard Tom Riddle inside of my head and I trembled as I pointed my wand towards the dementors that had entered the corridor.

Before I could shout the incantation, a flash of silver entered. A silver doe, the same Patronus that had rescued me months earlier, chased the creatures off.

Turning around, my wand flew out of my hand and landed several feet from me. Alecto now stood in front of me, obviously taking the shortcut that I had been unable to take, her wand pointed straight at my chest.

"I did not want to kill you, Weasley," she said calmly. "You would fare much better as leverage against that blood traitor family of yours. Oh well... accidents happen..." She smiled as she said it, "*Avada Ke-*"

I had shut my eyes, waiting for death, but it did not come. Instead, I heard the thump of a body and I looked. Alecto was now laying upon the floor, stunned, her wand in her outstretched hand. Looking around for my rescuer, no one revealed themselves.

Scooping up my cloak and wand, I ran again, rushing towards the one place I thought I'd be safe. I would enter the Room of Requirement and gather my thoughts, make a plan, and execute it. Coming closer to the door, another spell almost knocked me to my feet.

"*Accio Cloak!*" Amycus shouted.

I grabbed hold and pulled it back to my grip, slamming into the door of the Room. "I need a place to hide this," was the first thought that entered my mind. The door burst open and I was in the cathedral of junk.

"Not what I had in mind," I said loudly. It would have to do. Surely, Amycus couldn't enter this place, but when I looked back at the door, he rushed in after me. I shot a spell at him and raced off, down one aisle.

He was hot on my trail, firing spell after spell, but my shield charm was deflecting them. As luck would have it, I tripped, falling flat on my face, and biting my lip hard in the process. I rolled over and sat up.

Amycus was no longer running. In fact, he was sprawled out upon the floor, resembling his sister several corridors back.

I stood on my feet, on edge, ready for another Death Eater to pop up, perhaps from the wall of junk to my left, where several decrepit brooms sat, or to my right where a strange configuration of a wig and tiara sat upon more piles of junk.

"Come with me, quickly."

On instinct alone, I spun from my position and cast a Stunning spell. Slumping to the floor in a black cloak, his greasy hair falling over his shoulders, was Severus Snape. I had just stunned the Headmaster when he could have easily taken me from behind....

Was he the one that was protecting me?

I reached into my pocket for something to wipe my lip on and I pulled the photograph out, the one of Snape and Lily in their third year, winning Slughorn's award. I half-smiled, turning it over and looking at the back.

*Severus
and
Lily A. Evans*

T.

Snape

Third Year Top Honors

How things had changed so much from then. Snape, the shifty looking Slytherin who had called Lily an unforgivable name, was laying several feet from me, his loyalties always in question. Lily, the beautiful Gryffindor who had turned Snape away after too many second chances, was lying beneath the ground hundreds of kilometers away, her love lasting in the blood of the son she died to protect.

Severus T. Snape... Lily A. Evans...

I dropped the battered cloak on the floor as a connection formed in my mind that I should have seen so long ago. Lily's middle name and the password we used back in October... it was the same.

Surely it's a coincidence, I thought. It had been years since their friendship ended. Rushing from the Room, I needed to talk to Dumbledore. He would have the answers.

Shadows flickered from the torches, dancing against the walls and creating images that weren't really there. I shook my head, forgetting about the tricks that my mind was playing. I was safe. The Carrows were successfully stunned and I honestly felt no threat from Snape anymore.

Gulping, I stopped at the entrance to his office, staring at the gargoyles awaiting the password. Thinking back, I said clearly, "Autumn," expecting the entrance to appear, but it failed such expectations.

Disappointed, I pulled the photograph from my pocket and studied the Potions award winners. Turning it over to the back, I read the names again, and looked back at the gargoyles. I took a deep breath, and said, "Lily."

Part of me anticipated more failure, but another part knew that the door would open. Putting the photograph away and contemplating what this meant, I stepped into the entrance and onto the stairwell. Step by step, I ascended, remembering the terror I had felt so many months and thinking that it might not have been warranted.

Cautiously, I entered Snape's office, my wand drawn just in case. Scanning the portraits, I located the only one I wanted to see, his half-moon spectacles and the crooked nose as prominent as ever. Developing a smile, I called out to Dumbledore.

The former Headmaster opened his eyes and his well-known blue irises lit up. "Miss Weasley, we must stop meeting like this," he said.

I smiled wider. "Hello, Professor. I wanted to speak to you."

"Oh?" he asked. "You are risking punishment to converse with a portrait?"

I shrugged, grinning coyly. "I think I can handle another detention with Hagrid."

He raised his eyebrows and beckoned me closer. "Despite your bleeding lip, you look far more collected than the last time you were here. Am I right in assuming you have come to terms with certain situations?"

"Yes, sir," I replied, standing now directly in front of him. "I've been searching for a lot of answers."

"I imagine your search was successful, otherwise you would not be here," he said. "Do you understand now why I chose not to tell you?"

I nodded, swallowing apprehension. "Did..." I wanted badly to say his name to prove that I would not be intimidated by it. With no choice, I continued, "...*he* really split his soul more than once?"

Dumbledore pushed his spectacles up the bridge of his nose. "Six times. Seven distinct pieces."

"Seven," I repeated. "The most powerfully magic number."

"Indeed," he replied.

"Did you know that I would figure it out?"

"I had no doubt you would," Dumbledore said. "I am only surprised it took you so long."

"I've known for awhile," I said, "but I couldn't risk coming up here to talk to you until I unraveled another mystery."

"And what might that be?"

Silly old man, I thought. He had to know what I was talking about. He spent all this time in this office. He must know what Snape had been doing. I humored his question. "I think Snape has been protecting us," I replied. "He used to be friends with Lily Potter, did you know that?"

Dumbledore didn't say anything.

"Of course you knew that," I said, chuckling at myself. "But I don't understand.... He... Snape murdered you, didn't he?"

"It would appear so."

It could never be a simple yes or no with this man. He was always secretive and mysterious, never answering questions directly. Needless to say, that was not the answer I was looking for.

I sighed, looking at the Pensieve near Dumbledore. The substance within shimmered, as if memories were swirling about. I gripped the edges, wanting to sink in, but instead I looked back to Dumbledore.

He must have understood my expression. "You are well aware that knowledge is power," he said, gesturing towards the Pensieve. "You have been diligently searching for answers for a long time."

"You want me to look?"

Dumbledore shook his head. "This is not about what I *want*, my dear. I do not know whether all secrets will be revealed if you were to view the contents of this magical instrument. I am merely suggesting that a clever young lady such as yourself will never be content not knowing if that could end your search for answers."

"You know me too well, Professor," I said. "I *need* to know."

He nodded.

I gripped the sides of the Pensieve, considering, but my way forward was clear. Without hesitation, I plunged myself headfirst into the memories, and felt myself falling through years and years of thoughts.

When I landed, I found myself in a sunlit afternoon on a playground. Two girls were swinging a distance away and I moved closer, noticing the young features of Lily Evans. I wondered for a second if this was her memory.

The scene played out and I eventually understood that it must be Snape's memories that I was watching. After viewing this particular scene, I was taken to months later, perhaps the next summer, when Lily and Snape conversed about Hogwarts, and eventually Petunia was hurt by a falling branch.

Then the scene at Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, followed by the scene on the train, the Sorting, and several years passed in which the friends were top of their Potions class, and the scenes in their fifth year. I cringed when Snape called Lily a Mudblood.

"I'm sorry."

"I'm not interested."

"I'm sorry!"

"Save your breath."

After the scene, I watched Snape, perhaps days after his attempt to persuade Lily, trying to talk to her in the hallways, the classrooms, the Great Hall, but the fiery redhead would have nothing to do with her offender.

Snape, disheveled and frantic in what I assumed was the Slytherin Common Room, wrote three letters on the outside of a piece of parchment: L.A.E. He flipped the paper over and began to write, steadying his hand as he did so.

Dearest Lily... You refuse to look at me and you refuse to speak to me...

He wrote without stopping until he reached *I miss you so much...* He lifted the quill and placed it inside the ink bottle, breathing heavy. A tear fell from his pasty face and splashed upon the table. He frowned, perhaps contemplating if he should finally tell her how he really felt.

He lifted the quill from its inky chamber and began to confess upon the paper. *I love*

Even before Snape began to write, a stocky Slytherin was creeping up on Snape. His brown hair was shaved. His eyes were dark, as if no color could escape them. "Severus," he said roughly.

Snape jumped, dropping the quill to the floor. He turned in his chair and faced the boy. "Avery," he stuttered, "what... what do you want?"

"Give me the letter," he said.

Snape grabbed the letter of unfinished love and ran, pushing the boy away. He ran, clutching the words to his chest, tears burning the corners of his eyes. He ran, away from the students who had influenced him these years past, whose fault it was that the only girl he had ever loved now hated him.

He entered the Room of Requirement, panting, scanning the cathedral for a place to finish his letter or to hide, I do not know. He rushed over to a cupboard where several books were stacked, placed a hand on the topmost book, leaving an imprint in the dust.

The door began to open and Snape shoved the letter into the stack of books. He turned, wand ready, and faced the opening door. "Leave me alone, Avery."

Avery laughed coldly. "Severus, I heard what has happened between you and the Mudblood-"

"Don't CALL her that!" Snape screamed, mouth frothing.

Avery simply smiled. "The Dark Lord does not take kindly to those who go back on a promise. We promised him our services once we leave this place, and in return, we will have a place of wealth and empowerment in the new regime."

"I... I don't care anymore."

"You think Evans will ever forgive you?" Avery laughed, coming closer to Snape, his wand pointed directly at his chest. "I think I even saw her talking to Potter today. Isn't *he* the one you hate so much?"

Snape sank to his knees.

"And now you want to give up the only friends you have?" Avery said, clicking his tongue in shame. "No girl and now no friends... what are you to do, Severus?"

Snape lowered his wand, shaking uncontrollably. For the first time in my life, I wanted to place an arm around him, hold him tight, and guide him back to the good side, but the inevitable was clear. The choice Snape would make was evident.

Avery grinned. "I thought you'd come around... *Crucio!*"

Snape screamed, writhing in pain on the floor, and I cried out, rushing towards the torturer and trying to stop him.

The scene dissolved and I was standing beside a frozen Black lake beneath my tree. I stared curiously as James and Lily pulled away from a familiar kiss.

"You've always been the stag looking for his doe," Lily whispered. "You finally found her." She pulled him towards her and kissed him again.

I dashed around in the snow, looking for Snape. Surely he had to be there if this was his memory. I looked into the tree, expecting to see the dark eyes of the Slytherin staring down upon the scene. He wasn't.

"Lily, I'll catch up with you later. I've got to take care of something," James said, squeezing her forearm affectionately.

Although she looked disappointed, she replied, "That's probably for the best. I have Transfiguration notes to go over. Thanks... thanks for a beautiful day." She leaned closer and kissed him goodbye.

He watched her leave, trudging through the snow towards the castle. As she came closer to the entrance, he slowly reached into his pocket and extracted his wand. Once Lily was inside the castle, James aggressively pointed his wand at the trunk of the tree, *towards me*.

"How long have you been following us?" James snarled.

I froze. I was about to respond when a voice from behind me spoke. I turned just in time to watch Snape return to visibility.

"You..." Snape shouted, his words caught in his mouth as anger took control. His wand was drawn and was now pointed at James. "It's an act! You're pretending so you can get Lily. You're not a good person."

James shook his head. "I'll admit that I've done some horrible things to many people and I am trying to atone for that. And yes, Lily is a major reason for my wanting to change..." His arm was unwavering as he kept the wand in place. "Unlike yourself, I care about Lily enough *to change*."

"How dare you throw this back on me!" Snape roared, his mouth frothing. "You don't care about her!"

"That is the only thing you and I have ever had in common." He paused, allowing Snape to take the words in. He may have considered cursing the man right there, instead he lowered his wand, and said, "Don't let me catch you following us again." He turned.

Snape cast a spell, but the orange light barely missed James' shoulder. James turned around and had him against the tree trunk in one swift fluid motion. Wand pressed against Snape's temple, he said, "The only reason I don't destroy you is because Lily seems to think you have some good in you still..."

"What...?"

"I know better," James hissed. He pressed his free hand against Snape's left forearm. "You're seventeen now. Have you sold your soul to the devil yet? Have you been branded like a filthy cow? You had better hope we don't cross paths once we leave this school."

Snape pushed James backwards, but dropped his wand in the process. Without daring to pick it up, Snape screamed, "I will kill you, Potter."

James laughed mockingly. I shuddered at the irony of the statement. "It'll be a cold day in hell before Snivellus Snape is responsible for my death."

The scene dissolved and I listened to Snape and Dumbledore. Snape had made a terrible mistake, revealing the prophecy, and Voldemort had set his sight on the Potters. The next scene, James and Lily were dead, and Snape was devoting his life to the memory of Lily Evans, and promising to protect Harry. The scene faded.

Rain fell silently upon the tombstones. The only noise was the soft sound of splashing as they hit the marble and granite. Storm clouds above blocked out all forms of sunshine and happiness. The descending water passed through me without feeling.

The cemetery was barren save one man, driven to his knees, shouting at the heavens in remorse. The weather looked cold and unforgiving but the man in front of me appeared not to feel the chill, and I guessed he may never feel anything properly again.

I knew without reading the epitaph what had happened. I came closer, quietly and respectfully, despite knowing that Snape could not see me. Considering the events, it seemed to be the proper thing to do.

“Lily, I’m sorry...” Snape sputtered, the rain mixing with the tears, the grief blending with the precipitation. “I’m so sorry...”

I noticed he was dressed all in black, a sign of mourning. I imagined him deciding to never wear anything but dark attire, for he could not allow himself to forget. No more happiness meant no more color in his life... especially not green... not the same color of the eyes that would surely haunt his dreams from that moment on.

“I’m so sorry, Lily.”

The repeated apologies had no effect on the silent mound of dirt nor did the water wash his sin away. He would be in a state of perpetual mourning, eternally atoning for his transgressions.

He cried. I cried with him.

The scene faded. I stood inside of an unused classroom. Against the back wall, countless numbers of desks and chairs were stacked together, on top of each other and propped against each other. The years of dust caked the objects. Was I in another version of the Room of Requirement?

I peered through the faint darkness at the other end of the room. It was then that I realized that Snape was standing in front of an elaborately decorated mirror with a golden frame, etched with a strange language: *Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi*. With the mirror propped against the wall, Snape refused to tear his eyes away from it.

“Lily...” he muttered.

I crept closer, directly behind him, and looked at his reflection in the mirror. I expected to see his hooked-nose profile manifested on the surface, but I gasped when I saw not only him, but Lily Evans. She was smiling and hugging him.

“Back again, Severus?”

Snape and I turned from the mirror and found Dumbledore staring at Snape. Even in the shadows, I could tell there was a strong look of compassion for the Potions Master. Snape grunted softly and, with all the power he possessed, looked back at the mirror one last time before he joined Dumbledore’s side.

“When we moved the Mirror of Erised into this room, Severus, I recall asking you not to come back,” Dumbledore said, taking a seat at one of the properly positioned desks.

“I promised nothing, Dumbledore,” Snape said softly, the shame in his eyes evident.

“Need I remind you that the mirror shows no truth?” Dumbledore asked. “You will waste away if you spend too much time here.”

“I wasted away a long time ago,” Snape whispered. “That,” he pointed towards the mirror, “is the only truth I have left.” Snape took a seat at a desk directly beside the Headmaster.

The sound of a door unlatching echoed in the silent classroom. Dumbledore quickly waved his hand over himself and Snape. Both men disappeared in time for me to see *no one* walking through the opened door. I heard footsteps walking quickly towards the mirror, then a familiar cloak fell to the floor, and Harry stood where Snape had been standing only minutes prior.

I quickly rushed over to confirm my observation. Judging from the sweater he was wearing, Harry was only eleven years old. With fascination, he gazed towards the mirror. When I followed his stare, I was unable to view what he saw. I hypothesized that I could only see Snape’s images because this was Snape’s memory.

“So- back again, Harry?” Dumbledore said, greeting the boy in the same manner he had Snape. He had reappeared, leaving Snape still invisible.

Harry looked terrified as he turned to meet Dumbledore sitting at the desk. “I- I didn’t see you, sir.”

As I listened intently to their conversation, I took Harry’s place at the mirror, hoping it would work for me even though I was not part of this reality. It did.

I was staring at myself, just as I was, with the same dirty face and torn clothing I had when I plunged into these memories, but there was only one difference. Harry stood beside me, holding my hand and stroking my hair. His emerald eyes gazed at me with such love and admiration...

I couldn’t stop the tears from coming. In the reflection, Harry wiped them away, but as I stood on the outside of the fantasy, no one was there to dry my eyes.

“It shows us nothing more than the deepest, most desperate desires of our heart,” Dumbledore said, before continuing, and the man had never spoken truer words.

When Harry left the room, Snape returned to visibility. “How long before you move the mirror?” he asked Dumbledore.

“As soon as possible,” Dumbledore answered. “And I request the same thing of you that I did of Harry. It will more difficult for you since you know where it will be.”

“Very well,” Snape said. He turned to leave, his cloak billowing as he turned. He paused, and looked back. “What *do* you see when you look into the mirror?” Snape had not bought the explanation of socks any more than I did.

Dumbledore turned and looked at the mirror from a distance, lost in a memory. The Headmaster did not answer, simply walked towards the mirror. I quickly followed, but knew the memory would be over as soon as Snape walked out the door.

I had never seen Dumbledore speechless before and as the memory faded, I am sure I witnessed what was the beginning of the Headmaster's weeping. A thought struck me as the scene changed: maybe it was not for Harry and Snape he was relocating the mirror as much as it was for himself.

The years passed and Dumbledore and Snape were in the Headmaster's office. Dumbledore was barely conscious, his hand burned and dead looking. Snape was working hard to save him.

"Lord Voldemort foresees a moment in the near future when he will not need a spy at Hogwarts?" Dumbledore asked.

"He believes the school will soon be in his grasp, yes."

"And if it does fall into his grasp, I have your word that you will do all in your power to protect the students of Hogwarts?"

Snape nodded.

The rest of the scene transpired, followed by everything that happened in the Astronomy Tower when Snape was forced to strike down the man he admired the most, and then Snape and Mundungus, and then Snape accidentally slicing George's ear off, and the scene dissolved again.

Snape entered the kitchen, his cloak flowing behind him. The House-Elves all cowered in fear. "Elves," Snape started, "do not forget that you work for me and you must do what I say."

"House-Elves are sworn to do what the Headmaster says," Kreacher said. "Even if Headmaster is a murderer."

Snape's face turned darker. "I order you to protect the students of Hogwarts under all circumstances and I forbid you to tell them that I have made this order. If that is not clear, we will have a problem."

"Dobby thinks this is clear," Dobby said.

The scene changed. Snape paced in front of Dumbledore's portrait, ranting, raving, yelling. "Those insolent children are not helping the

situation,” he shouted. “Would it not be better to simply expel them all?”

Dumbledore shook his head. “Severus, they provide hope for the other students,” he answered. “Perhaps Miss Weasley can persuade young Malfoy after that detention you gave him. Yes, they must be allowed to test their boundaries.”

“They want to break into this office!” Snape hissed. “And steal this sword!” He pointed violently towards the Gryffindor Sword. “Potter’s girlfriend is just as reckless and insubordinate as he is.”

“Your anger is misplaced,” Dumbledore said. “Perhaps you are only seeing a redhead who reminds you so much of another, falling for a Potter boy?”

Snape inhaled heavily. “She is becoming frantic. She has not left this hallway for days.”

“Well then,” Dumbledore said. “You must allow her up. I think that I need to speak with her. Perhaps one of the Carrows will let the password slip, yes?”

The scene transformed.

Snape stood beneath the stands of the Quidditch pitch, the shadows hiding his face. Through the darkness, he watched five students step onto the field with their brooms. Snape muttered, “Foolish children.”

Snape must have felt the dementors’s influence before he saw them, because he buckled over, panting, repeating Lily’s name over and over again. Shaking the cold from deep within, he raised his wand, shouting, “*Expecto Patronum!*” The silver doe burst from the tip of the wand.

The secret Quidditch players finally noticed the changing atmosphere and dismounted their brooms. Looking skyward, Demelza screamed as a plethora of Dementors descended upon them.

Snape sent several more Patronuses out as the students scattered.

The scene changed and now Snape was taking the Sword and placing it inside a frozen pond, casting his doe afterwards. I watched him looking through the trees and Harry stripped to his underwear and descend into the water, followed by Ron saving him. They conversed, then Ron came running towards Snape's hiding place. We were gone before he arrived.

The scene dissolved and once again, Snape was speaking to Dumbledore.

"The Weasley girl is getting suspicious of me," Snape said, flexing his fingers and cracking his knuckles. "I overheard her talking to that pesky First Year."

"It does not surprise me that Miss Weasley is trying to unravel the mystery that is Severus Snape," Dumbledore said. "She has always desired to be knowledgeable. I wonder if she will be coming to visit me soon with more questions."

"You're not going to tell her anything, are you?" Snape questioned.

"There will be no need," Dumbledore replied. "She is a clever little witch. I'm sure she will have pieced together most of the puzzle before she seeks me out."

"And I am supposed to let her visit you again?" Snape demanded. "Dumbledore, I am running out of privileges to take away from her!"

"I presume if she risks coming up here again, she will be almost certain that she will be unharmed."

"I find that most dissatisfying," Snape replied, sitting down and glaring at the portrait. "She could jeopardize everything you have worked for, Dumbledore."

"Oh, I doubt that," Dumbledore said. "If there were anyone in the student body that I could trust with such secrets, it would be her. She surely has proven herself over the years. If not for her attachment to Harry, I would even consider telling her everything."

Snape shook his head in disbelief. He opened his mouth to say something, but stopped, and changed his expression. "The Carrows have been ordered to apprehend the girl for leverage over the Weasleys."

"Then you must make sure she can safely return to her family."

...Without warning, I was being pulled from the memory. With a hand upon my shoulder, I was wrenched away from the Pensieve and fell to the floor, looking into the face of Severus Snape.

He looked from me to Dumbledore's portrait. "How dare you, Dumbledore!" Snape growled. "You have no right to allow her into my memories."

"I am a portrait, Severus, how would you suggest I stop her?"

I stood up, feeling the damp cheeks of where I had been crying. As much as I felt a connection to Lily, I was feeling it to Snape now, as strange as that sounds. An unrequited love for so many years that he was still holding onto, doing things for Lily though she'd never know.

I placed a hand on Snape's shoulder and began to speak. "Professor, I'm sorry..."

Snape tore his arm away from me quickly. "Do not touch me," he hissed. "I do not need your sympathy. I do not need your *pity*."

While viewing these memories, I actually thought that the horrid man I had grown to despise all these years was nothing more than an act. I was saddened to realize that wasn't the case. I frowned, but still felt a strong connection to the man who had every reason to feel bitter.

"Dumbledore is right, Professor," I said quietly. "I won't say anything. I'm great at keeping secrets..."

Snape's cold gaze turned to me and cut my words off. He spoke, as if the actions had not transpired. "You are indefinitely suspended from Hogwarts. Your parents will be here shortly to take you home. I suggest you gather your belongings before the Carrows are revived. They will not be pleased once they are up."

I looked to Dumbledore, who nodded, and waved me off. I knew I shouldn't be asking any more questions... "Professor, did... did Lily ever know you were trying to save her?"

Snape lip curled. "No," he answered.

Being at home should have been a relief after such a long time of suffering, but it was not. After months of productive insurgency, I felt helpless being caged up inside the Burrow with nothing to do. Combine that with the little knowledge I had of the happenings of Hogwarts, I was desperate to go back.

Normally students didn't go home for Easter break so I knew most, if not all, of the DA were stuck in that school. I wondered if the Carrows, furious of my escape, had taken their anger out on my friends. I wondered if Snape could have any influence in protecting them.

From my seat on the edge of my bed, I looked at the calendar. It was the last day of Easter break. My heart, my continuously aching heart, extended to my comrades on the front line.

Double knocks on my door pulled me from my wonderings. I invited whomever it was inside and Fred and George, my wonderful twin brothers, strolled in. I didn't hesitate to embrace them each, despite the fact that they had been there when I arrived days ago, hiding out from the Death Eaters as well.

"Any news?" I asked automatically.

"Lee, Lupin, and Kingsley just arrived," Fred said. "I bet you'd like to hear a Potterwatch in person, wouldn't you?"

I nodded. That sounded like an excellent idea. I hadn't heard one for several weeks, although this was due to the Death Eaters that had invaded the area where they had been broadcasting.

"But there is news," George said. "It seems that Hagrid hosted a 'Support-Harry-Potter' Party for our fellow Army members stationed at Hogwarts."

"He didn't!" I exclaimed.

"He did," they answered in unison.

"The Carrows must have forgotten their invitations because they crashed the party," George explained.

"Luckily Hagrid had a bouncer," Fred said, smiling.

"Hey!" came a voice from the door.

Fred and George parted and Lee was standing in my door frame. I jumped from my seat and rushed over to embrace the friend I hadn't seen since August.

"I wanted to be the one to tell you about Grawp and Hagrid," Lee said, dropping me back to my feet. "I figured you'd get a kick out of it."

"Did anyone get hurt?" I asked, beseeching each of them.

"The Carrows will be feeling it in the morning," Lee said and he continued after I replied positively. "Hagrid and Grawp are hiding in the mountains, but as for our soldiers, we don't know yet."

"Any news of the Trio?" I asked. When they shook their heads, my heart sank. There had been nothing to report concerning them since their visit to the Lovegood home. I calmed myself. "No news is good news, right?" I questioned.

"That's what Lupin reckons," Lee replied. "If they got Harry, they wouldn't be quiet about it."

Knock Knock

The small crowd that had gathered in my room parted once more and Tonks was standing in my doorframe this time. She was glowing in the only way a soon-to-be mother could. Her belly, sticking out far from her small frame, was huge and round. I did some quick math in my head and decided she could be due soon.

"Remus wants to start soon," she said to the boys. "He doesn't want me out very long."

The twins and Lee shuffled from the room. I waited until they were gone to give Tonks the biggest hug ever since I had not seen her for a very long time either. I placed my hand on her bulging belly and felt the child within move. I smiled. "Have you thought of a name yet?"

Tonks nodded. "Teddy... after..." She was unable to conclude her sentence.

"Your dad," I finished for her, embracing her again. It had been only a week ago that she had found out her father had been murdered.

She was a strong witch though. Ted had died, but not in vain, and if she had anything to say about it, his murderers would eventually pay. That wasn't on her mind at the moment. "There's something I want to ask you," she said, wiping her eyes. "Remus and I both agreed. We want you to be Teddy's godmother."

"Me?" I replied. "But... I'm sixteen..."

"Old enough to lead a school rebellion but not to take care of a child?" Tonks said, teasingly pushing me. "If you don't want to, I'll understand..."

"No," I cut her off. "I'd be honored to. I was just surprised. If you and Lupin chose anybody to be a godparent to Teddy, I thought you'd choose Harry."

"Well..." Tonks started, attempting to conceal a smile and a sheepish look.

"You *are* going to ask him, aren't you?" I questioned and she nodded. "That's kind of expecting a lot out of Harry and me, don't you think?"

Tonks shrugged. "We trust you two and there aren't better choices." She grabbed my head and squeezed. "Harry has far too much on his plate right now. When we ask him, we won't mention we asked you, too. You can tell him once this war is over."

We walked together, reminiscing of the old days, and joined the audience for an episode of Potterwatch.

When Bill rushed us from the Burrow and safely secured us at Aunt Muriel's, he only briefly explained what was happening. The most important thing was that the Trio, including Luna and Dean, and especially Harry, were safe. It was difficult for me. For the first time in months, I knew exactly where they were, but Mum and Dad refused to allow me out of the house.

News from around the country reached us. Neville had been hiding out in the Room for several days and the remaining DA members were quickly joining him. Contrary to what Bill had told Harry, the twins were not continuing their mail-order business. Instead they were sending supplies, such as medical and defensive, to the Army via Aberforth.

There were many things I wanted tell Bill to relay to Harry and the others, but there didn't seem to be proper words that could express such emotions. Bill understood and said he'd send my love to each of them. I agreed. It was simple and I hoped it would get the message across.

I sought Ollivander out on the second day of his stay with us to talk to him about my friends. I had only met the man once in my life when Mum and Dad bought me my wand. It was a good day when I found out I'd be receiving one. And that was because of Harry. When he dumped Lockhart's books into my cauldron, we saved a fortune and Mum happily agreed to purchase me a wand.

Although I doubted he would remember me, I knocked on the man's door anyhow. When he invited me in, I saw him perched at a desk and hunched over a slender piece of wood. A long, red, string-like substance glimmered beside him. Wood shavings were scattered on the desk and floor. He held a knife in his hand, carving the timber.

Curiously, I asked, "Mr. Ollivander, what are you doing?"

"Hmm?" he replied, pausing and looking towards me, perhaps only realizing then that he had invited me in. "Ginevra Weasley, I presume. Hazel, phoenix feather, ten inches, firm," he said fondly. "Miss Lovegood has spoken very highly of you." He placed his knife upon the desk. "And I believe your question was what I am doing?"

“Yes, sir.”

“Carving our mutual friend her new wand.”

“By hand?”

He smiled knowingly. Perhaps he had taken part in this conversation with others before. “It is true that carving wands with magic works just fine, but the best wands, the ones that work flawlessly with their owner, are carved by hand.”

This was all very interesting, but I was recalling one of the first things Ollivander had said to me when I first came to his shop: *The wand chooses the wizard*. “How do you know Luna’s new wand will... choose her?”

“My dear, I have spent four months with the girl. We developed a close bond in the isolation and darkness. If my skill has not failed me, I am sure her new wand will suit her.” He held the piece of wood up to examine the coming smoothness. “I am eternally in Miss Lovegood’s debt. If not for her, I fear I might have gone insane.”

The irony of the statement amused me, remembering how so many people used to call her the loony one. “She is a very special person. I’m glad she’s okay,” I told him.

“And Potter and his friends,” Ollivander continued. “They rescued us from a certain death. I was beginning to lose hope.”

“What exactly happened at Malfoy Manor?” I asked him tentatively.

Ollivander shook his head. “My dear, I wish not to speak of it. Your brother Bill wanted to know as well, and also if I knew what Harry was planning. Of that, I have no idea.”

That was Harry for you. Always planning something, especially since the war had started. “Why would you know what he was planning?”

Ollivander placed the long piece of wood back upon the desk. “He questioned me. He is a curious young man, that Potter, asking deep questions about wands. He has that in common with You-Know-

Who..." He shuddered, perhaps remembering things he wished to forget. I didn't press the issue. "Whatever he is planning, I am not the one who would know. He has spent all his free time with the goblin."

"Griphook?" I questioned.

Ollivander nodded. "It is most unwise to make deals with their kind. Our manner of agreement differs from theirs drastically."

I was silent. Whatever Harry was planning with Griphook, it must have something to do with the Horcruxes. Perhaps the goblin was aware of where one was hidden. But the wandmaker in front of me was right. It isn't very smart to trust a goblin.

In my silence, Ollivander had picked up the long string and was examining it. "Dragon heartstring," he muttered, glancing at my inquisitive expression. "Your brother Charlie gave it to me." He straightened the cord upon the desk.

"Mr. Ollivander, do you mind if I watch you make the wand?" I asked.

"Feel free," he answered, "but I ask you to remain silent while I work."

Days went by. The same feelings of anxiousness plagued me. I so badly needed to be out of Aunt Muriel's, and not just because she was driving me insane. I couldn't understand why I was forbidden to visit Shell Cottage since it was protected the same way as the house I was residing in.

On the final day of our confinement, Fred and I were battling each other in a game of Wizard's Chess. For most of the game, we were evenly matched. Soon, though, I began to overtake his pieces.

It is very surreal looking back on that moment when less than twelve hours later, the scope of the whole Wizarding world would be transformed and the Weasley Family would be short one member. If I had known that would be the last time I'd be alone with a living Fred, I would have savored every laugh, every smile, every word, and every breath. If I had known, I would have pushed the chess set away instead of beating him, and held on, and never let go.

But I didn't know.

"When did you get so good at Chess?" Fred asked as he scratched his head. With a puzzled expression, he stared at the pieces that had checkmated his king.

"When you were off making loads of gold, Ron was teaching me," I replied. "I almost beat him last year in a fast-paced game."

"Lousy little git," he said jokingly of Ron. "Of all the things we were able to beat him at, Wizarding Chess was never one of them."

I laughed, but reminiscing about Ron brought back to my mind that he was currently residing at Shell Cottage. I frowned.

Fred sensed my sudden shift in moods. He placed his hand upon mine, his fingers brushing against my wrist. I winced just enough for him to notice. He slowly turned my hand over, inspecting the bruising and scars from the chains of detention.

I brought my hand back to my body and touched it tenderly with my free hand. "It's still sore," I muttered, trying not to draw attention to the pain.

Fred furrowed his eyebrows angrily at the thought of the torture I had endured. "I would've never forgiven Snape..."

I wanted to burst out and reveal that it wasn't Snape's fault, but I restrained myself. The war may have been on pause in my life, but there were still battles raging elsewhere. Snape's true loyalties would hopefully be revealed in due time and he would be hailed a hero.

"...if you had died," Fred said, his voice cracking in one of those rare moments that he allowed himself to be vulnerable in front of me. "I'd never be the same... I don't know if George or me ever told you, but you're our favorite sibling."

"I know," I replied, grinning coyly. "But I'm alive, Fred. I'm fine. I'm not going to die. You're here to protect me."

Fred nodded. "I swear, Ginevra Weasley, I won't let you die."

Without hesitation, I said the same back to him, but even as we each made the pledge, we understood it was an empty one. We had no control over such things, but you don't, and you can't, think about those things in times of war. You make promises that you can't possibly keep, and you hope with everything inside of you that fate will be on your side.

The moments of foolish guarantees passed and Fred sighed heavily, putting the chess set away. I watched him admirably and he then said, "Lupin and Kingsley won't be here tonight for *Potterwatch*."

"Oh," I replied disappointed. I knew that Lupin wouldn't be around since Teddy had just been born days before. I checked the time and saw that it was a half hour until they broadcasted.

"George and I were talking and Lee agreed," Fred said. "Since you're familiar with the show and the setup, how would you like to be a correspondent tonight?"

I jumped from my seat in excitement. "Are you *serious*?" I exclaimed. "*Of course!*" I felt invigorated, finally having something I could do for the resistance again. It would be so amazing to be on the opposite end, sharing the news with the Wizarding world and the Army at Hogwarts.

At that moment, Lee and George rushed in, thrilled expressions on their faces.

"You'll never believe it!" George cried.

"What?" I asked.

"I thought it was going to be a slow news day," Lee replied, his eyes bulging.

"What?" Fred questioned.

"And just in time for the broadcast!" George shouted.

"*WHAT?*" Fred and I both screamed.

"We interrupt this regularly scheduled static to bring you this breaking news," Lee said twenty-five minutes later, hardly able to contain his glee. "Rumors have been pouring in for a half-hour, and if the reports can be trusted, it looks like Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley, Hermione Granger, and an unnamed goblin have successfully escaped an attempted break-in at Gringotts.

"The small attack force infiltrated the Lestrangle vault and, when security was alerted, they freed a dragon guarding that particular level..." There was a note of amusement that Lee was unable to hide. "The Trio was last seen fleeing London on the back of the dragon.

"It is unclear what the intended target of the break-in was, but we here at *Potterwatch* are convinced that Potter, Weasley, and Granger are, and always have been, working hard to bring an end to the Chief Death Eater's regime."

Lee took a breath. George patted him on the shoulder. "That's going to be a hard act to follow, River," he said.

"Indeed it is," Lee replied. "As you may already have guessed, you are tuned into *Potterwatch*. Our regular correspondents Royal and Romulus will be unable to join us this evening, but I am pleased to welcome back Rapier and Raphael..."

"Hello!" the twins greeted in unison.

"I am also excited to welcome new contributor Red."

"Thanks, River," I said, as he squeezed my knee. I imagined Neville and the DA crowded around the wireless in the Room, eyes bulging at the sound of my voice.

"Fortunately," Lee continued, "no reports of any recent deaths have reached our ears. We reported last week that Augusta Longbottom was on the run. Since then, we have received a message from her. She is still on the run, but healthy and alive.

"Many Wizarding families have been forced into hiding. The Weasley Family, the Jordan Family, the Barton Family, and the Bones Family have all been confirmed to be in safe houses but getting along fine.

“We now turn to Raphael for an update of the New Wizarding Order.”

“Thanks, River,” George replied. “The Ministry has begun to issue status cards for all witches and wizards. The cards will identify your name, address, and most significantly, how much magical blood you have. For obvious reasons, we have refused to register for the cards.

“It also appears that Royal’s words have finally come true and the war has begun to shift into other magical races. The Ministry has begun to seek out tribes of dwarves, centaurs, and goblins, among others for registration. Where once we attempted to live somewhat harmoniously with other creatures, the new Ministry are placing the proverbial shackles on their wrists and turning them into nothing more than slaves.”

“Thank you, Raphael...” Lee began.

I froze for a moment since it was my turn next. I would be talking to thousands of people throughout the Wizarding World. It was killer on my nerves.

“...Red.”

“T-thanks, River,” I said. I caught his eye and he pointed to his chest and mouthed the words *from the heart, Gin...* I cleared my throat. “First of all, let me say how honored I am to be sitting here. I have listened to this broadcast for months. It has kept me hoping like you wouldn’t believe.”

“We’re glad to have you,” Lee said, grinning.

“I have listened intently for news on Harry Potter and I agreed with Romulus. If the Boy-Who-Lived had been captured and killed, nothing would crush our spirits more than that single action. I am grateful that we know exactly where Harry has been for two weeks. Whatever he and his friends are doing, I know without a doubt that it will bring the fall of the darkest wizard in the world.

“I remember you asking Romulus what he would say to Harry if he knew he was listening, and if I have that same opportunity and if Harry is listening right now, I have a message for you...”

I knew what I *wanted* to tell Harry if I could speak to him, but most of those utterances I didn't want the public to hear.

"You've been gone for a long time, Harry, and we've been waiting for you patiently. We've persevered in your name and your memory, and we've supported you since the beginning. Whenever you need us, you can count on us. We miss you, and I love... W-we love you..."

I paused, wiping two tears away.

"Well spoken, Red," River said quietly.

Hours later, I lay in my bed, thinking over the broadcast, playing absentmindedly with my DA coin. Lee had congratulated me on a job well done and I hoped the audience felt the same way. In the darkness, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace. I'd be able to sleep well that evening.

The coin turned hot. It took me a moment to understand that a message was being sent. I scrambled for my wand, but when I groped for it, I dropped it to the floor. Grunting, I leapt from my bed and scrambled on the ground, searching for it.

Three simultaneous cracks indicated that three people had entered my room.

"Ginny," Fred called as he lit his wand, illuminating his, George's, and Lee's face. He peered down at me. "What are you doing on the floor?"

"The bed was uncomfortable," I said sarcastically. "Can you summon my wand?"

"*Accio Ginny's wand,*" Fred shouted, my wand flying from under the bed. He caught it and handed it to me. "Harry's back, Ginny. Get ready. We're headed to Hogwarts as soon as possible."

I processed the words in my mind, gripped the coin hard in my hand, and grinned wider than I had grinned in a long time. "Well," I replied slowly, "we'd be leaving a lot faster if you'd give a girl some privacy to change."

Chapter Sixteen: Mysteries Unraveled

The Quidditch pitch was covered in darkness, shadows dancing eerily against the vacant seats. Thick coarse smoke met the sky in a union of blue and black, the ash of a burning fire blotting out the sun, causing the shapes of sinister faces to be peering down upon Hogwarts.

The early January chill was erased by the heat of an inferno. Fire blazed in the center of the field as orange and yellow reflected in the eyes of the evil, representing the hell in which they were forged.

Hundreds of the Hogwarts students were lined up around the bonfire, forced to attend for fear of reprisal, each holding a handful of books that would soon meet their fiery demise. There was no need to guess which books were targeted. Only the day before, a list of publications had been posted that would have to be burned.

"The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection" by Quentin Trimble
"A History of Magic" by Bathilda Bagshot
"Hogwarts, a History" by Victor Vanholder
"Home Life and Social Habits of British Muggles" by Wilhelm Wigworthy
"A Study of Muggles" by Charity Burbage
"Quidditch Throughout the Ages" by Kennilworthy Whisp

Any book they decided would corrupt young minds was stripped from the curriculum and banned from the school. Not even the library was safe. It was purged in the silent horror of Madam Pince. If Hermione had been there, she would have had a heart attack.

An army of twenty, named after the wizard who had always protected us, stood together beneath the stands, watching the scene that was playing out. We were short one soldier, the only one of us that had been captured by the enemy, paying for the actions of her father.

I looked at the man who had become my leader. Light flickered off his solemn face as he stared towards the blaze, flames flashing in his eyes, too. They may have started a fire literally in this field, but they had not anticipated the one burning in this man. They had taken his heart when they had taken Luna.

Amycus and Alecko were now shouting demands and the line of students began shuffling by the fire, dropping the books into the flames. The Death Eaters looked more like monsters than humans, reveling in the destructions of pro-Muggle literature and propaganda.

Neville turned towards us, jerked his head towards the Pitch, and said, "Let's go." His voice was distant and the spark I had come to admire was not there. He gripped a book in his hands.

Neville stepped from the shadows of the stands and, one by one, we followed behind him. As the crowd noticed us, their lines stopped flowing and each student stared in hushed fascination. The Carrows stopped shouting and watched us come closer.

The crackling of the fire and the soft thump of our feet were the only things heard. Amycus smiled broadly, perhaps noticing the books we were carrying and assuming we were joining the festivities.

Neville paused several feet away and held his book towards them. Amycus' smile immediately dropped as Neville held the book higher so that all within range could see. As the Death Eater sneered, Neville tossed the book into the flames. And without so much as a word, the rest of the Army threw our "Dark Arts" textbooks into the blaze.

We paid dearly for that one, especially Neville, and it was the last public rebellion we staged until the Final Battle started.

Several days after, I sat with Coote and Peaks at the Gryffindor table for dinner, each of us nursing the welts of whips and the ache of curses.

Neville, who had been sent down to solitary confinement and most likely torture, entered the Great Hall. He looked horrible. His robes were torn and his face was bloodied and bruised. He still had that far away look in his eyes as he scanned the room for something. His gaze fell on us, but kept searching. I imagined him alone for hours, chained up against the cold stone, with nothing to keep him company but the thoughts of whether or not Luna was safe.

I was about to rise and greet him, but Draco passed by him, and Neville's eyes fell upon the Slytherin. They burned bright and he grabbed the back of Draco's robes, flattening him upon the Gryffindor table, spreading dishes and food everywhere.

"Where is she, you bastard?" Neville snarled, his wand pointed directly into his face as the students cleared a circle around them. Neville's grip was never as strong.

Draco's stare dared Neville to move, but then looked towards me for assistance. Instead, while teachers and Slytherins came to break it up, I cast several shield charms in a ring to obstruct anyone's path, and then performed the Muffliato charm so they could talk as loudly as they wanted.

"You are just as insane as *she* is!" Draco hissed. "They force me to take meals to her like a common house-elf! She thinks I care what a bloody Crumple-Horned Snorkack is."

Neville loosened his grip and let Draco back to his feet. "She's... she's okay then?"

Draco, without warning, withdrew his wand and blasted Neville off his feet. He stepped closer, towering over him, and said with distain, "For now."

The shouts of students ceased as Snape broke my shield charm. He walked directly to the two boys, staring coldly from one to the other. "Longbottom, I assumed you would exercise more caution. Did you not just leave the dungeons for your stunt on Monday?"

Neville stood to his feet, holding his chest where Draco had hit him. "Yes, *Sir*."

"You will join Weasley in detention tonight with Hagrid," Snape said. When I opened my mouth to protest, he cut me off. "Did you honestly believe you were powerful enough to cast a shield I could not break?" he asked, contempt oozing from every pore of his body. "And were you ignorant enough to think I could not recognize my own spell and be unable to break that as well?"

“Severus,” said McGonagall, entering the circle, “if Miss Weasley is to be punished for protecting her fellow Gryffindor from outside retribution, then I must insist Mr. Malfoy receive the same punishment for protecting himself.”

“Very well. Dinner is over. Your detention begins... now.” He whipped around, his cloak flowing behind him, and his greasy hair waving in his wake.

Exiting the Great Hall, Neville and I silently conversed about Luna as Draco followed reluctantly behind. “Are you all right?” I asked Neville quietly.

“I am now,” he said, the distance he had been exercising slowly diminishing. “I still hate that she’s in captivity, but at least she’s alright.”

I felt a hand on my shoulder, spinning me around from behind, along with Neville. Draco stared at us with an angry expression. “You know what I don’t get?” he asked violently, poking Neville in the chest. “I have been risking my neck to help you, but I don’t get any respect.”

“Do you really think you deserve respect?” Neville questioned.

“In case you haven’t noticed, I have been keeping my end of the bargain,” Draco hissed. He dug into his pockets and pulled the coin out that I had given him. “The Carrows would love to know how your precious army is communicating. I could have easily told them by now.”

“You gave him a coin?” Neville asked, looking aghast.

I ignored him. “What’s your point, Malfoy?”

Sneering, he replied, “My point is you don’t need to rough me up to get your damn information. Keep your filthy Blood Traitor hands off me.”

“Filthy blood traitor,” I repeated, pronouncing each word with emphasis. “You really have no idea, do you?” I almost pitied the bloke.

Draco grinded his teeth and his lip curled. "Things may be in black and white in your world, Weasley, but I live in a gray existence. I'm not sure what you expect me to do. Start wearing Gryffindor colors? Make a banner for the Chosen One? Not a chance in hell."

I was going to speak, but Neville spoke up. "That girl you call insane, I love her. That girl you call Mudblood, I love her. This girl here-" he motioned towards me, "-that you call Blood Traitor, I love her. The list goes on, Malfoy, of the people I love. You-Know-Who threatens their lives and the only way for them to be safe is for him to fall. If you love your family as much as you say you do, your path forward is clear."

Draco frowned, his head vibrating from anger. Without another word, he turned from us and left, ignoring the fact he was supposed to be in detention.

"That went smoothly," I muttered, watching Draco turn the corner. I rejoined Neville in our journey to detention. "Just so you know, that coin can only communicate with mine."

"Good," Neville replied, looking relieved. "But if he rats us out..."

"I think there's hope for him," I said, explaining how Draco had been behaving each time I met with him and how he had come within inches of admitting he wanted Voldemort defeated. "He could have let you believe Luna was dead when you had him pinned on the table, but he still told you."

Neville considered it. "He looks like it hurts him to even think about helping us. I just hope that when the time comes and it really matters, he'll choose a side."

Coming to Hagrid's door, we knocked, but there was no answer. The inside was completely dark and the door was locked. No one must have informed Hagrid that we were on our way down for punishment.

"Do you think he already went into the woods?" Neville asked, looking wearily towards the Forest. "Do you remember whose night it was to go with him?"

"Anthony and Terry," I replied.

A deep moan escaped the forest on the wings of the breeze. I looked towards the shadows of the trees and back to Neville, questioning whether or not we should investigate.

Neville shrugged. "We're not supposed to..."

I laughed and said, "When have we followed the rules this year?" I tugged at his sleeve. "C'mon, aren't you curious?"

Stepping towards the Forest, the moan was carried to our ears again. On the edge of the tree line, we stood as the sun set into the horizon. The forest was dark and we plunged into the darkness, lighting our wands to guide our paths.

Wandering around, we called out for Hagrid. Several minutes of gallivanting brought us further into woods. The brush was thick and the aura of creepiness gripped our senses even more. The sound of hooves on the ground up ahead alerted us to the presence of at least one centaur.

"Show yourself!" called a voice from up ahead.

Neville and I slowly broke through the brush and entered the clearing. Faint light from the setting sun showed us the tall figure of a centaur. His bow was drawn and had an arrow aimed at my heart. I held my hands up to show that I meant no harm.

"I told the others not to show their faces here again," the centaur said. "So they send others in their place? Do you think my kind unintelligent that we would not be offended?"

"No, Sir," Neville replied, his hands raised, too. "We heard moaning. We were just investigating."

The centaur raised his bow slightly. "Perhaps you think the centaurs need Wizard assistance," he shouted. "That we can't take care of our forest?"

From the other end the field, another centaur galloped towards the first. "Ronan, the intruder has been apprehended. Do you want to see him or do you wish for us to dispose of him straightaway?"

Ronan lowered his bow and nodded. "I will deal with him, Bane. Make sure these trespassers leave." Ronan placed his bow and arrow in his quiver and galloped away, disappearing into the trees.

Bane looked at us with disdain. He pointed the way we came and said, "Leave, wizards. Your kind is not welcome here. Consider yourself lucky you were not killed."

My curiosity took control. "Bane, sir, who was the other intruder?" I thought that one of the DA members abroad had entered the forest, seeking to be allies with the Hogwarts centaurs. I hoped that they were not captured and killed.

Bane considered my question, and answered, "It does not matter, young one. Leave now."

"How can you just kill them?" I shouted, knowing I was entering dangerous territory. "They only were seeking your help."

"Seeking our help?" Bane bellowed, rearing up on his hind legs. "They did not enter the forest looking for our help. They come here, with their ideas of peace, calling us *near-human* intelligence, and demanding we register with the Ministry! You call that help!?"

I looked at Neville and back to Bane, aware of my mistaken assumption. "I'm sorry, Bane. I thought it might have been friends of ours," I said quietly. "You say the Ministry was here?"

"We refuse to be governed by their laws," Bane shouted. "And we will not join your cause. Centaurs are a proud race and live separately from your kind."

"What will you do, then, when they come for you?" Neville asked loudly.

"We will fight!" Bane answered. "And die if necessary."

"Then you will die for nothing!" Neville shouted. "Why can't you see this is not just a Wizard's war? The Wizards need your help and you're letting your selfish ideals get in the way?"

Bane had withdrawn his bow fast and Neville had his wand pointed at the centaur faster.

"You dare point your wand at me?" Bane said.

"You dare point your bow at me?" Neville asked. Sweat dripped from the tip of his nose. If he was scared, he didn't show it.

Bane peered at Neville for a long time, eyes flickering from his face to his wand and back again. Without lowering his bow nor dropping his guard, he said, "You have shown bravery beyond your years." The string tightened on his bow. "The heavens have predicted a major shift in power. The end for one is drawing nigh and it will be soon. We centaurs will not choose sides."

"You're making a mistake."

Bane raised his bow and shot an arrow past Neville's face, narrowly missing the Gryffindor. "We do not make mistakes." He pointed his finger towards the way we came. "Leave."

As the cold winter months passed, we ceased all activity that would draw attention to ourselves. Too many people were getting hurt. We didn't have the luxury of Madam Pomfrey anymore, and there's only so much students can do for the injured. Since our actions were more secret, Demelza and Sarah returned to the DA, along with a handful of other students.

We were still doing underground stuff. We stole medical supplies and clandestinely assisted the wounded the best we could. We met with students that needed counseling or convincing. We sabotaged any dangerous potions that we were forced to make.

When February arrived, Apparition lessons started. I was not allowed to learn it. In fact, any Sixth Year associated with me or Neville was banned from the lessons.

Since I had that extra free time, I spent it with Angerona in the Room of Requirement. She was a fast learner, already able to Disarm me, Neville, Michael, and several other older members of the DA. On the

grounds that she would only use it if she needed to contact me, I had finally given Ang a coin.

After a productive lesson with her, Simon, and several other First Years, we sat in the Room, ready to listen to the week's episode of Potterwatch. Unfortunately, we could only find static.

"You don't think they were captured, do you?" Lavender asked.

It was possible, of course, but Draco hadn't passed any new information to me that week, so I was convinced they were all right. "They might be relocating," I suggested.

The Army, disappointed that their favorite show was not on, slowly filed out of the room. Soon it was only Angerona, Neville, and, me. Neville looked relaxed on a bean bag chair and appeared as if he were dozing.

"Any news on your searches?" Angerona asked me.

I had resumed my search for answers since we had returned from Christmas break but the truth was that no answers were being found, at least not anything concrete. I pointed my wand at the door and cast the Muffliato charm.

"Not really," I said, summoning several books in my direction. Placing them all in front of me, I said, "The only thing that seems strange is how Snape and Lily looked like they were friends when they were younger."

Angerona grabbed a yearbook and flipped open to a marked page. It was Lily in her first year, standing next to Snape in the Potions Club. They were close to each other, laughing before the pose. "You're right," Angerona said.

"But it doesn't mean anything," I said, explaining that the friendship looked as if it just disappeared after their fifth year. "From their fifth year to their seventh, there are no more pictures that would even indicate that they knew each other."

“Didn’t Harry say that Dumbledore trusted Snape because he said he was sorry about her dying?” Angerona asked. “Do you reckon he was telling the truth?”

“Not you, too,” Neville moaned, opening his eyes and looking at the First Year. “Whatever friendship Snape and Lily had doesn’t matter anymore. Snape... killed... Dumbledore.... End of story...” He stood up and sighed. “We should head back.”

Angerona and I both stood up and gathered our things. “How’s the other search?” she whispered as we exited the Room.

I hadn’t told anyone about my search for the Horcruxes, but she was a perceptive little witch, and she most likely pieced together that I was searching for two separate things. “What other search?” I asked innocently.

“The one you don’t ever talk about,” she replied. “You wouldn’t have to sneak around looking through all those Dark Arts books if you had just kept your textbook.”

I stopped. “What did you say?”

Angerona paused beside me and frowned. She repeated herself.

I opened my mouth to continue, but nothing came out except a gasp. Widening my eyes, I called to Neville, “Take Ang back to the Common Room. I need to go to Ravenclaw.”

Rushing towards the opposite tower took very little time. I couldn’t believe I had overlooked something so simple. All the books with Horcrux information had been taken from the library by Dumbledore and were now in Hermione’s possession, that much I knew, and no amount of searching through the old collection would give me what I needed.

But that was the *old* authority in this school. The new authority of this school didn’t care what dark books were in the library... *or what dark books were being used for teaching...*

I hadn't opened my Dark Arts textbook on principle alone, but that might have been a mistake, and now I didn't even have one since I had chucked it into the fire. But there was a person who hadn't been able to get rid of her book because she had not been there with us.

Luna's textbook, I hoped, would still be in her dorm room.

I caught Michael just as he was entering the Tower, and I slipped in unnoticed beneath my cloak. Rushing into Luna's room, I threw light into the candles and searched around. On her nightstand, I found a stack of books.

I grabbed them and quickly went through each, dropping her Potions book on the floor in the process. Transfiguration, Care of Magical Creatures.... *Dark Arts*.... I opened to the glossary at the end and looked for the section "H." Running my finger down the list of topics, I stopped upon the word that had evaded my searches for months: *Horcrux*

While my hands trembled, I speedily turned the pages, fearing that if I didn't find it as soon as possible, it would be gone again and I would never discover the truth. Ignoring the paper cuts on my fingers, I settled at last on the appropriate page with detained breath.

There it was, staring back at me, defeated at last, *found at last*. Since January of the year before, it had always been just out of reach, just out of earshot, and now, finally, I would understand why the Trio had left and why they had been so secretive with their plans.

Reading over the description, I cried, the tears falling to the text book and staining the pages. I understood fully why *Magick Moste Evile* had refused to even give a brief description of what they were.

I examined myself in Luna's mirror, placing a hand against the cool glass. Part of Voldemort's soul had been inside of me. I felt sick to my stomach. With disgust in my eyes, I watched my chest rise and fall with breath, hoping that the residue of the darkest wizard had not lingered. I felt so dirty, even after all the years of being free from him.

But I'm not free, I thought. His influence was still evident all around. He had created more than one Horcrux. He had become impossible

to kill. He had become immortal. The only way to be free from Voldemort now rested in the hands of the bravest people I had ever met.

I picked up Luna's potion book from the floor and a piece of paper fell from it. I reached down and picked that up as well. I curiously looked at the photograph that had been inside Slughorn's scrapbook, the one of Lily and Snape in their third year. It must have somehow slipped into Luna's book when all the pictures scattered about. I placed it into my pocket.

It might not be necessary to state, but the nightmares were stronger than ever that night, and I finally understood why Dumbledore wanted to keep that particular piece of information from me.

The next two months flew by quickly. Both opposing sides were relatively quiet. It gave me a lot of time to ponder and think. I talked to the teachers and the staff, but no one had any answers to the Patronus mystery. The only person I thought might have the answer was Dumbledore and I wasn't about to march right into the lion's den again.

Several days before Easter break, I attended my last DA meeting. While I was exiting, Draco stood there at a statue watching me.

"Lost, Malfoy?" I asked.

Draco shook his head and gazed at me annoyingly. Leaning against the statue, he replied, "I'm not sure how you survive. It could have been anyone standing here."

"Are you showing concern for me?" I asked, in disbelief.

His lip curled as he looked away. "No," he said coldly. "I know something that might interest you." He checked the corridor nervously. He cleared his throat before continuing. "Easter break is in two days. You might want to watch your back." He was about to walk away.

I grabbed his arm and stopped him. "No, not good enough," I said. "The last time you gave information like that, I had no idea what you meant and we lost Luna. Details, Malfoy."

Draco frowned at me and straightened up, eyes boring straight into my eyes.

"There's no one here to impress," I said, motioning around the empty corridors. I held up my Cloak. "And I'm alone."

"Fine," he snarled. "The Carrows are done putting up with your rebellion. I don't know what they're planning, but it's not going to be pretty. If I were you, I'd run."

"I'm going home for Easter," I replied, "but I will pass that information along." I stared at him for an uncomfortable several seconds. Pondering, I asked, "Why is it so hard for you to do the right thing?"

"We've been over this," Draco replied. "Whatever fairy-tale fantasy you have of me suddenly developing a conscience and willingly standing against the Dark Lord is just that... *fantasy*. The quicker you accept that, the less disappointed you'll be in me."

"I don't believe that," I said, slipping the Cloak around my shoulders. "I think there's hope for you, and I think you know there is, too."

Draco was silent, breathing in the air from the hallway in a long inhale. Shaking his head slowly, he turned and disappeared into the dark corridor, leaving me alone. I placed the Cloak over my head and vanished from sight.

When I arrived at the threshold of the Gryffindor entrance, I was about to say the password when I heard the Fat Lady speaking to another portrait that we called the Blue Knight.

"I'm not sure what he wanted," the Fat Lady said.

"You shouldn't have let him in," the Blue Knight said.

"He is the Headmaster!" the Fat Lady replied. "And he had the password. On both accounts, I must listen to him. We are bound to serve the current Headmaster."

“But he made us all swear to protect the students at all costs,” the Blue Knight said. “Surely that meant even from *himself*. He doesn’t exactly have a reputation of being merciful. After Dumbledore...”

The Fat Lady let out a sob. “Do not remind me!” she wailed. “If he murders her here in her room, I will never forgive myself for letting him in tonight. Ginny is one of my favorite students.”

I stifled a gasp. Snape was in my room. I thought we had some time to consider what we were going to do. I thought I’d have time to warn the others. But why was he waiting for me?

“He hasn’t been up for years, has he?” the Blue Knight continued, oblivious to my worried feelings.

“Not for almost two decades,” the Fat Lady said. “He would have spent the night out here waiting for her if she hadn’t come out to send him away.”

“He tried to apologize,” the Blue Knight said.

“It had been coming for months, maybe even longer,” the Fat Lady replied. “Lily Evans might have been a forgiving young lady, but even she understood where Snape was headed.”

I pulled off my Cloak and the Fat Lady gasped. “Ginny!” she cried.

“Beetle eyes,” I muttered, considering what I had just heard. When she wouldn’t open, I said it again, more forcibly.

“He is waiting for you, Ginny. I can’t...”

“I won’t go into my room,” I said. “I’ll come right back. I just need to tell Neville something. Please.”

The Fat Lady reluctantly allowed me through and I raced to Neville’s room. Rushing in, I shook him awake. “Neville,” I hissed. “Wake up now!”

Neville sat up, eyes wide, gripping his wand. He must have slept with it these days. “Ginny?” he asked groggily. “What’s wrong?”

I quickly told him what Draco had passed on to me and that Snape was waiting for me in my room. "I have to run," I thought wildly. "If Harry comes here, make sure you get a message to me. Take care of Angerona." I hugged him tightly and rushed out the room, wondering if he thought it was a dream.

Rushing away from Gryffindor Tower, I had no idea where I was running. With my cloak trailing behind me like a banner in my hand, I didn't know what to do. Could I escape the castle in the middle of the night? Could I make it back to my house safely? Could I....

No more wondering. A flash of light had shot across my path, shattering the rock of the wall. I stopped dead in my tracks, looked to the side, and found Alecto Carrow staring at me. She raised her wand to strike again and I quickly put up a shield.

"Damn girl!" she screamed when the spell rebounded, missing her face by inches.

Without thinking, I threw the Cloak over me and ran. Turning a corner, I felt one of the spells rip through the bottom of the Cloak and my calf burned. Moving faster, I felt a trickle of warm blood on my leg. I stopped, throwing the Cloak off, and whipped myself around to face the corner I had just come from.

Wand raised, I waited for Alecto to follow. Instead, I felt cold inside, starting from deep within and flowing through all of my extremities. I heard Tom Riddle inside of my head and I trembled as I pointed my wand towards the dementors that had entered the corridor.

Before I could shout the incantation, a flash of silver entered. A silver doe, the same Patronus that had rescued me months earlier, chased the creatures off.

Turning around, my wand flew out of my hand and landed several feet from me. Alecto now stood in front of me, obviously taking the shortcut that I had been unable to take, her wand pointed straight at my chest.

"I did not want to kill you, Weasley," she said calmly. "You would fare much better as leverage against that blood traitor family of yours. Oh well... accidents happen..." She smiled as she said it, "*Avada Ke-*"

I had shut my eyes, waiting for death, but it did not come. Instead, I heard the thump of a body and I looked. Alecko was now laying upon the floor, stunned, her wand in her outstretched hand. Looking around for my rescuer, no one revealed themselves.

Scooping up my cloak and wand, I ran again, rushing towards the one place I thought I'd be safe. I would enter the Room of Requirement and gather my thoughts, make a plan, and execute it. Coming closer to the door, another spell almost knocked me to my feet.

"*Accio Cloak!*" Amycus shouted.

I grabbed hold and pulled it back to my grip, slamming into the door of the Room. "I need a place to hide this," was the first thought that entered my mind. The door burst open and I was in the cathedral of junk.

"Not what I had in mind," I said loudly. It would have to do. Surely, Amycus couldn't enter this place, but when I looked back at the door, he rushed in after me. I shot a spell at him and raced off, down one aisle.

He was hot on my trail, firing spell after spell, but my shield charm was deflecting them. As luck would have it, I tripped, falling flat on my face, and biting my lip hard in the process. I rolled over and sat up.

Amycus was no longer running. In fact, he was sprawled out upon the floor, resembling his sister several corridors back.

I stood on my feet, on edge, ready for another Death Eater to pop up, perhaps from the wall of junk to my left, where several decrepit brooms sat, or to my right where a strange configuration of a wig and tiara sat upon more piles of junk.

"Come with me, quickly."

On instinct alone, I spun from my position and cast a Stunning spell. Slumping to the floor in a black cloak, his greasy hair falling over his shoulders, was Severus Snape. I had just stunned the Headmaster when he could have easily taken me from behind....

Was he the one that was protecting me?

I reached into my pocket for something to wipe my lip on and I pulled the photograph out, the one of Snape and Lily in their third year, winning Slughorn's award. I half-smiled, turning it over and looking at the back.

*Severus
and
Lily A. Evans*

T.

Snape

Third Year Top Honors

How things had changed so much from then. Snape, the shifty looking Slytherin who had called Lily an unforgivable name, was laying several feet from me, his loyalties always in question. Lily, the beautiful Gryffindor who had turned Snape away after too many second chances, was lying beneath the ground hundreds of kilometers away, her love lasting in the blood of the son she died to protect.

Severus T. Snape... Lily A. Evans...

I dropped the battered cloak on the floor as a connection formed in my mind that I should have seen so long ago. Lily's middle name and the password we used back in October... it was the same.

Surely it's a coincidence, I thought. It had been years since their friendship ended. Rushing from the Room, I needed to talk to Dumbledore. He would have the answers.

Shadows flickered from the torches, dancing against the walls and creating images that weren't really there. I shook my head, forgetting about the tricks that my mind was playing. I was safe. The Carrows were successfully stunned and I honestly felt no threat from Snape anymore.

Gulping, I stopped at the entrance to his office, staring at the gargoyles awaiting the password. Thinking back, I said clearly, "Autumn," expecting the entrance to appear, but it failed such expectations.

Disappointed, I pulled the photograph from my pocket and studied the Potions award winners. Turning it over to the back, I read the names again, and looked back at the gargoyles. I took a deep breath, and said, "Lily."

Part of me anticipated more failure, but another part knew that the door would open. Putting the photograph away and contemplating what this meant, I stepped into the entrance and onto the stairwell. Step by step, I ascended, remembering the terror I had felt so many months and thinking that it might not have been warranted.

Cautiously, I entered Snape's office, my wand drawn just in case. Scanning the portraits, I located the only one I wanted to see, his half-moon spectacles and the crooked nose as prominent as ever. Developing a smile, I called out to Dumbledore.

The former Headmaster opened his eyes and his well-known blue irises lit up. "Miss Weasley, we must stop meeting like this," he said.

I smiled wider. "Hello, Professor. I wanted to speak to you."

"Oh?" he asked. "You are risking punishment to converse with a portrait?"

I shrugged, grinning coyly. "I think I can handle another detention with Hagrid."

He raised his eyebrows and beckoned me closer. "Despite your bleeding lip, you look far more collected than the last time you were here. Am I right in assuming you have come to terms with certain situations?"

"Yes, sir," I replied, standing now directly in front of him. "I've been searching for a lot of answers."

"I imagine your search was successful, otherwise you would not be here," he said. "Do you understand now why I chose not to tell you?"

I nodded, swallowing apprehension. "Did..." I wanted badly to say his name to prove that I would not be intimidated by it. With no choice, I continued, "...*he* really split his soul more than once?"

Dumbledore pushed his spectacles up the bridge of his nose. "Six times. Seven distinct pieces."

"Seven," I repeated. "The most powerfully magic number."

"Indeed," he replied.

"Did you know that I would figure it out?"

"I had no doubt you would," Dumbledore said. "I am only surprised it took you so long."

"I've known for awhile," I said, "but I couldn't risk coming up here to talk to you until I unraveled another mystery."

"And what might that be?"

Silly old man, I thought. He had to know what I was talking about. He spent all this time in this office. He must know what Snape had been doing. I humored his question. "I think Snape has been protecting us," I replied. "He used to be friends with Lily Potter, did you know that?"

Dumbledore didn't say anything.

"Of course you knew that," I said, chuckling at myself. "But I don't understand.... He... Snape murdered you, didn't he?"

"It would appear so."

It could never be a simple yes or no with this man. He was always secretive and mysterious, never answering questions directly. Needless to say, that was not the answer I was looking for.

I sighed, looking at the Pensieve near Dumbledore. The substance within shimmered, as if memories were swirling about. I gripped the edges, wanting to sink in, but instead I looked back to Dumbledore.

He must have understood my expression. "You are well aware that knowledge is power," he said, gesturing towards the Pensieve. "You have been diligently searching for answers for a long time."

"You want me to look?"

Dumbledore shook his head. "This is not about what I *want*, my dear. I do not know whether all secrets will be revealed if you were to view the contents of this magical instrument. I am merely suggesting that a clever young lady such as yourself will never be content not knowing if that could end your search for answers."

"You know me too well, Professor," I said. "I *need* to know."

He nodded.

I gripped the sides of the Pensieve, considering, but my way forward was clear. Without hesitation, I plunged myself headfirst into the memories, and felt myself falling through years and years of thoughts.

When I landed, I found myself in a sunlit afternoon on a playground. Two girls were swinging a distance away and I moved closer, noticing the young features of Lily Evans. I wondered for a second if this was her memory.

The scene played out and I eventually understood that it must be Snape's memories that I was watching. After viewing this particular scene, I was taken to months later, perhaps the next summer, when Lily and Snape conversed about Hogwarts, and eventually Petunia was hurt by a falling branch.

Then the scene at Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, followed by the scene on the train, the Sorting, and several years passed in which the friends were top of their Potions class, and the scenes in their fifth year. I cringed when Snape called Lily a Mudblood.

"I'm sorry."

"I'm not interested."

"I'm sorry!"

"Save your breath."

After the scene, I watched Snape, perhaps days after his attempt to persuade Lily, trying to talk to her in the hallways, the classrooms, the Great Hall, but the fiery redhead would have nothing to do with her offender.

Snape, disheveled and frantic in what I assumed was the Slytherin Common Room, wrote three letters on the outside of a piece of parchment: L.A.E. He flipped the paper over and began to write, steadying his hand as he did so.

Dearest Lily... You refuse to look at me and you refuse to speak to me...

He wrote without stopping until he reached *I miss you so much...* He lifted the quill and placed it inside the ink bottle, breathing heavy. A tear fell from his pasty face and splashed upon the table. He frowned, perhaps contemplating if he should finally tell her how he really felt.

He lifted the quill from its inky chamber and began to confess upon the paper. *I love*

Even before Snape began to write, a stocky Slytherin was creeping up on Snape. His brown hair was shaved. His eyes were dark, as if no color could escape them. "Severus," he said roughly.

Snape jumped, dropping the quill to the floor. He turned in his chair and faced the boy. "Avery," he stuttered, "what... what do you want?"

"Give me the letter," he said.

Snape grabbed the letter of unfinished love and ran, pushing the boy away. He ran, clutching the words to his chest, tears burning the corners of his eyes. He ran, away from the students who had influenced him these years past, whose fault it was that the only girl he had ever loved now hated him.

He entered the Room of Requirement, panting, scanning the cathedral for a place to finish his letter or to hide, I do not know. He rushed over to a cupboard where several books were stacked, placed a hand on the topmost book, leaving an imprint in the dust.

The door began to open and Snape shoved the letter into the stack of books. He turned, wand ready, and faced the opening door. "Leave me alone, Avery."

Avery laughed coldly. "Severus, I heard what has happened between you and the Mudblood-"

"Don't CALL her that!" Snape screamed, mouth frothing.

Avery simply smiled. "The Dark Lord does not take kindly to those who go back on a promise. We promised him our services once we leave this place, and in return, we will have a place of wealth and empowerment in the new regime."

"I... I don't care anymore."

"You think Evans will ever forgive you?" Avery laughed, coming closer to Snape, his wand pointed directly at his chest. "I think I even saw her talking to Potter today. Isn't *he* the one you hate so much?"

Snape sank to his knees.

"And now you want to give up the only friends you have?" Avery said, clicking his tongue in shame. "No girl and now no friends... what are you to do, Severus?"

Snape lowered his wand, shaking uncontrollably. For the first time in my life, I wanted to place an arm around him, hold him tight, and guide him back to the good side, but the inevitable was clear. The choice Snape would make was evident.

Avery grinned. "I thought you'd come around... *Crucio!*"

Snape screamed, writhing in pain on the floor, and I cried out, rushing towards the torturer and trying to stop him.

The scene dissolved and I was standing beside a frozen Black lake beneath my tree. I stared curiously as James and Lily pulled away from a familiar kiss.

"You've always been the stag looking for his doe," Lily whispered. "You finally found her." She pulled him towards her and kissed him again.

I dashed around in the snow, looking for Snape. Surely he had to be there if this was his memory. I looked into the tree, expecting to see the dark eyes of the Slytherin staring down upon the scene. He wasn't.

"Lily, I'll catch up with you later. I've got to take care of something," James said, squeezing her forearm affectionately.

Although she looked disappointed, she replied, "That's probably for the best. I have Transfiguration notes to go over. Thanks... thanks for a beautiful day." She leaned closer and kissed him goodbye.

He watched her leave, trudging through the snow towards the castle. As she came closer to the entrance, he slowly reached into his pocket and extracted his wand. Once Lily was inside the castle, James aggressively pointed his wand at the trunk of the tree, *towards me*.

"How long have you been following us?" James snarled.

I froze. I was about to respond when a voice from behind me spoke. I turned just in time to watch Snape return to visibility.

"You..." Snape shouted, his words caught in his mouth as anger took control. His wand was drawn and was now pointed at James. "It's an act! You're pretending so you can get Lily. You're not a good person."

James shook his head. "I'll admit that I've done some horrible things to many people and I am trying to atone for that. And yes, Lily is a major reason for my wanting to change..." His arm was unwavering as he kept the wand in place. "Unlike yourself, I care about Lily enough *to change*."

“How dare you throw this back on me!” Snape roared, his mouth frothing. “You don’t care about her!”

“That is the only thing you and I have ever had in common.” He paused, allowing Snape to take the words in. He may have considered cursing the man right there, instead he lowered his wand, and said, “Don’t let me catch you following us again.” He turned.

Snape cast a spell, but the orange light barely missed James’ shoulder. James turned around and had him against the tree trunk in one swift fluid motion. Wand pressed against Snape’s temple, he said, “The only reason I don’t destroy you is because Lily seems to think you have some good in you still...”

“What...?”

“I know better,” James hissed. He pressed his free hand against Snape’s left forearm. “You’re seventeen now. Have you sold your soul to the devil yet? Have you been branded like a filthy cow? You had better hope we don’t cross paths once we leave this school.”

Snape pushed James backwards, but dropped his wand in the process. Without daring to pick it up, Snape screamed, “I will kill you, Potter.”

James laughed mockingly. I shuddered at the irony of the statement. “It’ll be a cold day in hell before Snivellus Snape is responsible for my death.”

The scene dissolved and I listened to Snape and Dumbledore. Snape had made a terrible mistake, revealing the prophecy, and Voldemort had set his sight on the Potters. The next scene, James and Lily were dead, and Snape was devoting his life to the memory of Lily Evans, and promising to protect Harry. The scene faded.

Rain fell silently upon the tombstones. The only noise was the soft sound of splashing as they hit the marble and granite. Storm clouds above blocked out all forms of sunshine and happiness. The descending water passed through me without feeling.

The cemetery was barren save one man, driven to his knees, shouting at the heavens in remorse. The weather looked cold and unforgiving but the man in front of me appeared not to feel the chill, and I guessed he may never feel anything properly again.

I knew without reading the epitaph what had happened. I came closer, quietly and respectfully, despite knowing that Snape could not see me. Considering the events, it seemed to be the proper thing to do.

“Lily, I’m sorry...” Snape sputtered, the rain mixing with the tears, the grief blending with the precipitation. “I’m so sorry...”

I noticed he was dressed all in black, a sign of mourning. I imagined him deciding to never wear anything but dark attire, for he could not allow himself to forget. No more happiness meant no more color in his life... especially not green... not the same color of the eyes that would surely haunt his dreams from that moment on.

“I’m so sorry, Lily.”

The repeated apologies had no effect on the silent mound of dirt nor did the water wash his sin away. He would be in a state of perpetual mourning, eternally atoning for his transgressions.

He cried. I cried with him.

The scene faded. I stood inside of an unused classroom. Against the back wall, countless numbers of desks and chairs were stacked together, on top of each other and propped against each other. The years of dust caked the objects. Was I in another version of the Room of Requirement?

I peered through the faint darkness at the other end of the room. It was then that I realized that Snape was standing in front of an elaborately decorated mirror with a golden frame, etched with a strange language: *Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi*. With the mirror propped against the wall, Snape refused to tear his eyes away from it.

“Lily...” he muttered.

I crept closer, directly behind him, and looked at his reflection in the mirror. I expected to see his hooked-nose profile manifested on the surface, but I gasped when I saw not only him, but Lily Evans. She was smiling and hugging him.

“Back again, Severus?”

Snape and I turned from the mirror and found Dumbledore staring at Snape. Even in the shadows, I could tell there was a strong look of compassion for the Potions Master. Snape grunted softly and, with all the power he possessed, looked back at the mirror one last time before he joined Dumbledore’s side.

“When we moved the Mirror of Erised into this room, Severus, I recall asking you not to come back,” Dumbledore said, taking a seat at one of the properly positioned desks.

“I promised nothing, Dumbledore,” Snape said softly, the shame in his eyes evident.

“Need I remind you that the mirror shows no truth?” Dumbledore asked. “You will waste away if you spend too much time here.”

“I wasted away a long time ago,” Snape whispered. “That,” he pointed towards the mirror, “is the only truth I have left.” Snape took a seat at a desk directly beside the Headmaster.

The sound of a door unlatching echoed in the silent classroom. Dumbledore quickly waved his hand over himself and Snape. Both men disappeared in time for me to see *no one* walking through the opened door. I heard footsteps walking quickly towards the mirror, then a familiar cloak fell to the floor, and Harry stood where Snape had been standing only minutes prior.

I quickly rushed over to confirm my observation. Judging from the sweater he was wearing, Harry was only eleven years old. With fascination, he gazed towards the mirror. When I followed his stare, I was unable to view what he saw. I hypothesized that I could only see Snape’s images because this was Snape’s memory.

“So- back again, Harry?” Dumbledore said, greeting the boy in the same manner he had Snape. He had reappeared, leaving Snape still invisible.

Harry looked terrified as he turned to meet Dumbledore sitting at the desk. “I- I didn’t see you, sir.”

As I listened intently to their conversation, I took Harry’s place at the mirror, hoping it would work for me even though I was not part of this reality. It did.

I was staring at myself, just as I was, with the same dirty face and torn clothing I had when I plunged into these memories, but there was only one difference. Harry stood beside me, holding my hand and stroking my hair. His emerald eyes gazed at me with such love and admiration...

I couldn’t stop the tears from coming. In the reflection, Harry wiped them away, but as I stood on the outside of the fantasy, no one was there to dry my eyes.

“It shows us nothing more than the deepest, most desperate desires of our heart,” Dumbledore said, before continuing, and the man had never spoken truer words.

When Harry left the room, Snape returned to visibility. “How long before you move the mirror?” he asked Dumbledore.

“As soon as possible,” Dumbledore answered. “And I request the same thing of you that I did of Harry. It will more difficult for you since you know where it will be.”

“Very well,” Snape said. He turned to leave, his cloak billowing as he turned. He paused, and looked back. “What *do* you see when you look into the mirror?” Snape had not bought the explanation of socks any more than I did.

Dumbledore turned and looked at the mirror from a distance, lost in a memory. The Headmaster did not answer, simply walked towards the mirror. I quickly followed, but knew the memory would be over as soon as Snape walked out the door.

I had never seen Dumbledore speechless before and as the memory faded, I am sure I witnessed what was the beginning of the Headmaster's weeping. A thought struck me as the scene changed: maybe it was not for Harry and Snape he was relocating the mirror as much as it was for himself.

The years passed and Dumbledore and Snape were in the Headmaster's office. Dumbledore was barely conscious, his hand burned and dead looking. Snape was working hard to save him.

"Lord Voldemort foresees a moment in the near future when he will not need a spy at Hogwarts?" Dumbledore asked.

"He believes the school will soon be in his grasp, yes."

"And if it does fall into his grasp, I have your word that you will do all in your power to protect the students of Hogwarts?"

Snape nodded.

The rest of the scene transpired, followed by everything that happened in the Astronomy Tower when Snape was forced to strike down the man he admired the most, and then Snape and Mundungus, and then Snape accidentally slicing George's ear off, and the scene dissolved again.

Snape entered the kitchen, his cloak flowing behind him. The House-Elves all cowered in fear. "Elves," Snape started, "do not forget that you work for me and you must do what I say."

"House-Elves are sworn to do what the Headmaster says," Kreacher said. "Even if Headmaster is a murderer."

Snape's face turned darker. "I order you to protect the students of Hogwarts under all circumstances and I forbid you to tell them that I have made this order. If that is not clear, we will have a problem."

"Dobby thinks this is clear," Dobby said.

The scene changed. Snape paced in front of Dumbledore's portrait, ranting, raving, yelling. "Those insolent children are not helping the

situation,” he shouted. “Would it not be better to simply expel them all?”

Dumbledore shook his head. “Severus, they provide hope for the other students,” he answered. “Perhaps Miss Weasley can persuade young Malfoy after that detention you gave him. Yes, they must be allowed to test their boundaries.”

“They want to break into this office!” Snape hissed. “And steal this sword!” He pointed violently towards the Gryffindor Sword. “Potter’s girlfriend is just as reckless and insubordinate as he is.”

“Your anger is misplaced,” Dumbledore said. “Perhaps you are only seeing a redhead who reminds you so much of another, falling for a Potter boy?”

Snape inhaled heavily. “She is becoming frantic. She has not left this hallway for days.”

“Well then,” Dumbledore said. “You must allow her up. I think that I need to speak with her. Perhaps one of the Carrows will let the password slip, yes?”

The scene transformed.

Snape stood beneath the stands of the Quidditch pitch, the shadows hiding his face. Through the darkness, he watched five students step onto the field with their brooms. Snape muttered, “Foolish children.”

Snape must have felt the dementors’s influence before he saw them, because he buckled over, panting, repeating Lily’s name over and over again. Shaking the cold from deep within, he raised his wand, shouting, “*Expecto Patronum!*” The silver doe burst from the tip of the wand.

The secret Quidditch players finally noticed the changing atmosphere and dismounted their brooms. Looking skyward, Demelza screamed as a plethora of Dementors descended upon them.

Snape sent several more Patronuses out as the students scattered.

The scene changed and now Snape was taking the Sword and placing it inside a frozen pond, casting his doe afterwards. I watched him looking through the trees and Harry stripped to his underwear and descend into the water, followed by Ron saving him. They conversed, then Ron came running towards Snape's hiding place. We were gone before he arrived.

The scene dissolved and once again, Snape was speaking to Dumbledore.

"The Weasley girl is getting suspicious of me," Snape said, flexing his fingers and cracking his knuckles. "I overheard her talking to that pesky First Year."

"It does not surprise me that Miss Weasley is trying to unravel the mystery that is Severus Snape," Dumbledore said. "She has always desired to be knowledgeable. I wonder if she will be coming to visit me soon with more questions."

"You're not going to tell her anything, are you?" Snape questioned.

"There will be no need," Dumbledore replied. "She is a clever little witch. I'm sure she will have pieced together most of the puzzle before she seeks me out."

"And I am supposed to let her visit you again?" Snape demanded. "Dumbledore, I am running out of privileges to take away from her!"

"I presume if she risks coming up here again, she will be almost certain that she will be unharmed."

"I find that most dissatisfying," Snape replied, sitting down and glaring at the portrait. "She could jeopardize everything you have worked for, Dumbledore."

"Oh, I doubt that," Dumbledore said. "If there were anyone in the student body that I could trust with such secrets, it would be her. She surely has proven herself over the years. If not for her attachment to Harry, I would even consider telling her everything."

Snape shook his head in disbelief. He opened his mouth to say something, but stopped, and changed his expression. "The Carrows have been ordered to apprehend the girl for leverage over the Weasleys."

"Then you must make sure she can safely return to her family."

...Without warning, I was being pulled from the memory. With a hand upon my shoulder, I was wrenched away from the Pensieve and fell to the floor, looking into the face of Severus Snape.

He looked from me to Dumbledore's portrait. "How dare you, Dumbledore!" Snape growled. "You have no right to allow her into my memories."

"I am a portrait, Severus, how would you suggest I stop her?"

I stood up, feeling the damp cheeks of where I had been crying. As much as I felt a connection to Lily, I was feeling it to Snape now, as strange as that sounds. An unrequited love for so many years that he was still holding onto, doing things for Lily though she'd never know.

I placed a hand on Snape's shoulder and began to speak. "Professor, I'm sorry..."

Snape tore his arm away from me quickly. "Do not touch me," he hissed. "I do not need your sympathy. I do not need your *pity*."

While viewing these memories, I actually thought that the horrid man I had grown to despise all these years was nothing more than an act. I was saddened to realize that wasn't the case. I frowned, but still felt a strong connection to the man who had every reason to feel bitter.

"Dumbledore is right, Professor," I said quietly. "I won't say anything. I'm great at keeping secrets..."

Snape's cold gaze turned to me and cut my words off. He spoke, as if the actions had not transpired. "You are indefinitely suspended from Hogwarts. Your parents will be here shortly to take you home. I suggest you gather your belongings before the Carrows are revived. They will not be pleased once they are up."

I looked to Dumbledore, who nodded, and waved me off. I knew I shouldn't be asking any more questions... "Professor, did... did Lily ever know you were trying to save her?"

Snape lip curled. "No," he answered.

Being at home should have been a relief after such a long time of suffering, but it was not. After months of productive insurgency, I felt helpless being caged up inside the Burrow with nothing to do. Combine that with the little knowledge I had of the happenings of Hogwarts, I was desperate to go back.

Normally students didn't go home for Easter break so I knew most, if not all, of the DA were stuck in that school. I wondered if the Carrows, furious of my escape, had taken their anger out on my friends. I wondered if Snape could have any influence in protecting them.

From my seat on the edge of my bed, I looked at the calendar. It was the last day of Easter break. My heart, my continuously aching heart, extended to my comrades on the front line.

Double knocks on my door pulled me from my wonderings. I invited whomever it was inside and Fred and George, my wonderful twin brothers, strolled in. I didn't hesitate to embrace them each, despite the fact that they had been there when I arrived days ago, hiding out from the Death Eaters as well.

"Any news?" I asked automatically.

"Lee, Lupin, and Kingsley just arrived," Fred said. "I bet you'd like to hear a Potterwatch in person, wouldn't you?"

I nodded. That sounded like an excellent idea. I hadn't heard one for several weeks, although this was due to the Death Eaters that had invaded the area where they had been broadcasting.

"But there is news," George said. "It seems that Hagrid hosted a 'Support-Harry-Potter' Party for our fellow Army members stationed at Hogwarts."

"He didn't!" I exclaimed.

"He did," they answered in unison.

"The Carrows must have forgotten their invitations because they crashed the party," George explained.

"Luckily Hagrid had a bouncer," Fred said, smiling.

"Hey!" came a voice from the door.

Fred and George parted and Lee was standing in my door frame. I jumped from my seat and rushed over to embrace the friend I hadn't seen since August.

"I wanted to be the one to tell you about Grawp and Hagrid," Lee said, dropping me back to my feet. "I figured you'd get a kick out of it."

"Did anyone get hurt?" I asked, beseeching each of them.

"The Carrows will be feeling it in the morning," Lee said and he continued after I replied positively. "Hagrid and Grawp are hiding in the mountains, but as for our soldiers, we don't know yet."

"Any news of the Trio?" I asked. When they shook their heads, my heart sank. There had been nothing to report concerning them since their visit to the Lovegood home. I calmed myself. "No news is good news, right?" I questioned.

"That's what Lupin reckons," Lee replied. "If they got Harry, they wouldn't be quiet about it."

Knock Knock

The small crowd that had gathered in my room parted once more and Tonks was standing in my doorframe this time. She was glowing in the only way a soon-to-be mother could. Her belly, sticking out far from her small frame, was huge and round. I did some quick math in my head and decided she could be due soon.

"Remus wants to start soon," she said to the boys. "He doesn't want me out very long."

The twins and Lee shuffled from the room. I waited until they were gone to give Tonks the biggest hug ever since I had not seen her for a very long time either. I placed my hand on her bulging belly and felt the child within move. I smiled. "Have you thought of a name yet?"

Tonks nodded. "Teddy... after..." She was unable to conclude her sentence.

"Your dad," I finished for her, embracing her again. It had been only a week ago that she had found out her father had been murdered.

She was a strong witch though. Ted had died, but not in vain, and if she had anything to say about it, his murderers would eventually pay. That wasn't on her mind at the moment. "There's something I want to ask you," she said, wiping her eyes. "Remus and I both agreed. We want you to be Teddy's godmother."

"Me?" I replied. "But... I'm sixteen..."

"Old enough to lead a school rebellion but not to take care of a child?" Tonks said, teasingly pushing me. "If you don't want to, I'll understand..."

"No," I cut her off. "I'd be honored to. I was just surprised. If you and Lupin chose anybody to be a godparent to Teddy, I thought you'd choose Harry."

"Well..." Tonks started, attempting to conceal a smile and a sheepish look.

"You *are* going to ask him, aren't you?" I questioned and she nodded. "That's kind of expecting a lot out of Harry and me, don't you think?"

Tonks shrugged. "We trust you two and there aren't better choices." She grabbed my head and squeezed. "Harry has far too much on his plate right now. When we ask him, we won't mention we asked you, too. You can tell him once this war is over."

We walked together, reminiscing of the old days, and joined the audience for an episode of Potterwatch.

When Bill rushed us from the Burrow and safely secured us at Aunt Muriel's, he only briefly explained what was happening. The most important thing was that the Trio, including Luna and Dean, and especially Harry, were safe. It was difficult for me. For the first time in months, I knew exactly where they were, but Mum and Dad refused to allow me out of the house.

News from around the country reached us. Neville had been hiding out in the Room for several days and the remaining DA members were quickly joining him. Contrary to what Bill had told Harry, the twins were not continuing their mail-order business. Instead they were sending supplies, such as medical and defensive, to the Army via Aberforth.

There were many things I wanted tell Bill to relay to Harry and the others, but there didn't seem to be proper words that could express such emotions. Bill understood and said he'd send my love to each of them. I agreed. It was simple and I hoped it would get the message across.

I sought Ollivander out on the second day of his stay with us to talk to him about my friends. I had only met the man once in my life when Mum and Dad bought me my wand. It was a good day when I found out I'd be receiving one. And that was because of Harry. When he dumped Lockhart's books into my cauldron, we saved a fortune and Mum happily agreed to purchase me a wand.

Although I doubted he would remember me, I knocked on the man's door anyhow. When he invited me in, I saw him perched at a desk and hunched over a slender piece of wood. A long, red, string-like substance glimmered beside him. Wood shavings were scattered on the desk and floor. He held a knife in his hand, carving the timber.

Curiously, I asked, "Mr. Ollivander, what are you doing?"

"Hmm?" he replied, pausing and looking towards me, perhaps only realizing then that he had invited me in. "Ginevra Weasley, I presume. Hazel, phoenix feather, ten inches, firm," he said fondly. "Miss Lovegood has spoken very highly of you." He placed his knife upon the desk. "And I believe your question was what I am doing?"

“Yes, sir.”

“Carving our mutual friend her new wand.”

“By hand?”

He smiled knowingly. Perhaps he had taken part in this conversation with others before. “It is true that carving wands with magic works just fine, but the best wands, the ones that work flawlessly with their owner, are carved by hand.”

This was all very interesting, but I was recalling one of the first things Ollivander had said to me when I first came to his shop: *The wand chooses the wizard*. “How do you know Luna’s new wand will... choose her?”

“My dear, I have spent four months with the girl. We developed a close bond in the isolation and darkness. If my skill has not failed me, I am sure her new wand will suit her.” He held the piece of wood up to examine the coming smoothness. “I am eternally in Miss Lovegood’s debt. If not for her, I fear I might have gone insane.”

The irony of the statement amused me, remembering how so many people used to call her the loony one. “She is a very special person. I’m glad she’s okay,” I told him.

“And Potter and his friends,” Ollivander continued. “They rescued us from a certain death. I was beginning to lose hope.”

“What exactly happened at Malfoy Manor?” I asked him tentatively.

Ollivander shook his head. “My dear, I wish not to speak of it. Your brother Bill wanted to know as well, and also if I knew what Harry was planning. Of that, I have no idea.”

That was Harry for you. Always planning something, especially since the war had started. “Why would you know what he was planning?”

Ollivander placed the long piece of wood back upon the desk. “He questioned me. He is a curious young man, that Potter, asking deep questions about wands. He has that in common with You-Know-

Who..." He shuddered, perhaps remembering things he wished to forget. I didn't press the issue. "Whatever he is planning, I am not the one who would know. He has spent all his free time with the goblin."

"Griphook?" I questioned.

Ollivander nodded. "It is most unwise to make deals with their kind. Our manner of agreement differs from theirs drastically."

I was silent. Whatever Harry was planning with Griphook, it must have something to do with the Horcruxes. Perhaps the goblin was aware of where one was hidden. But the wandmaker in front of me was right. It isn't very smart to trust a goblin.

In my silence, Ollivander had picked up the long string and was examining it. "Dragon heartstring," he muttered, glancing at my inquisitive expression. "Your brother Charlie gave it to me." He straightened the cord upon the desk.

"Mr. Ollivander, do you mind if I watch you make the wand?" I asked.

"Feel free," he answered, "but I ask you to remain silent while I work."

Days went by. The same feelings of anxiousness plagued me. I so badly needed to be out of Aunt Muriel's, and not just because she was driving me insane. I couldn't understand why I was forbidden to visit Shell Cottage since it was protected the same way as the house I was residing in.

On the final day of our confinement, Fred and I were battling each other in a game of Wizard's Chess. For most of the game, we were evenly matched. Soon, though, I began to overtake his pieces.

It is very surreal looking back on that moment when less than twelve hours later, the scope of the whole Wizarding world would be transformed and the Weasley Family would be short one member. If I had known that would be the last time I'd be alone with a living Fred, I would have savored every laugh, every smile, every word, and every breath. If I had known, I would have pushed the chess set away instead of beating him, and held on, and never let go.

But I didn't know.

"When did you get so good at Chess?" Fred asked as he scratched his head. With a puzzled expression, he stared at the pieces that had checkmated his king.

"When you were off making loads of gold, Ron was teaching me," I replied. "I almost beat him last year in a fast-paced game."

"Lousy little git," he said jokingly of Ron. "Of all the things we were able to beat him at, Wizarding Chess was never one of them."

I laughed, but reminiscing about Ron brought back to my mind that he was currently residing at Shell Cottage. I frowned.

Fred sensed my sudden shift in moods. He placed his hand upon mine, his fingers brushing against my wrist. I winced just enough for him to notice. He slowly turned my hand over, inspecting the bruising and scars from the chains of detention.

I brought my hand back to my body and touched it tenderly with my free hand. "It's still sore," I muttered, trying not to draw attention to the pain.

Fred furrowed his eyebrows angrily at the thought of the torture I had endured. "I would've never forgiven Snape..."

I wanted to burst out and reveal that it wasn't Snape's fault, but I restrained myself. The war may have been on pause in my life, but there were still battles raging elsewhere. Snape's true loyalties would hopefully be revealed in due time and he would be hailed a hero.

"...if you had died," Fred said, his voice cracking in one of those rare moments that he allowed himself to be vulnerable in front of me. "I'd never be the same... I don't know if George or me ever told you, but you're our favorite sibling."

"I know," I replied, grinning coyly. "But I'm alive, Fred. I'm fine. I'm not going to die. You're here to protect me."

Fred nodded. "I swear, Ginevra Weasley, I won't let you die."

Without hesitation, I said the same back to him, but even as we each made the pledge, we understood it was an empty one. We had no control over such things, but you don't, and you can't, think about those things in times of war. You make promises that you can't possibly keep, and you hope with everything inside of you that fate will be on your side.

The moments of foolish guarantees passed and Fred sighed heavily, putting the chess set away. I watched him admirably and he then said, "Lupin and Kingsley won't be here tonight for *Potterwatch*."

"Oh," I replied disappointed. I knew that Lupin wouldn't be around since Teddy had just been born days before. I checked the time and saw that it was a half hour until they broadcasted.

"George and I were talking and Lee agreed," Fred said. "Since you're familiar with the show and the setup, how would you like to be a correspondent tonight?"

I jumped from my seat in excitement. "Are you *serious*?" I exclaimed. "*Of course!*" I felt invigorated, finally having something I could do for the resistance again. It would be so amazing to be on the opposite end, sharing the news with the Wizarding world and the Army at Hogwarts.

At that moment, Lee and George rushed in, thrilled expressions on their faces.

"You'll never believe it!" George cried.

"What?" I asked.

"I thought it was going to be a slow news day," Lee replied, his eyes bulging.

"What?" Fred questioned.

"And just in time for the broadcast!" George shouted.

"*WHAT?*" Fred and I both screamed.

"We interrupt this regularly scheduled static to bring you this breaking news," Lee said twenty-five minutes later, hardly able to contain his glee. "Rumors have been pouring in for a half-hour, and if the reports can be trusted, it looks like Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley, Hermione Granger, and an unnamed goblin have successfully escaped an attempted break-in at Gringotts.

"The small attack force infiltrated the Lestrangle vault and, when security was alerted, they freed a dragon guarding that particular level..." There was a note of amusement that Lee was unable to hide. "The Trio was last seen fleeing London on the back of the dragon.

"It is unclear what the intended target of the break-in was, but we here at *Potterwatch* are convinced that Potter, Weasley, and Granger are, and always have been, working hard to bring an end to the Chief Death Eater's regime."

Lee took a breath. George patted him on the shoulder. "That's going to be a hard act to follow, River," he said.

"Indeed it is," Lee replied. "As you may already have guessed, you are tuned into *Potterwatch*. Our regular correspondents Royal and Romulus will be unable to join us this evening, but I am pleased to welcome back Rapier and Raphael..."

"Hello!" the twins greeted in unison.

"I am also excited to welcome new contributor Red."

"Thanks, River," I said, as he squeezed my knee. I imagined Neville and the DA crowded around the wireless in the Room, eyes bulging at the sound of my voice.

"Fortunately," Lee continued, "no reports of any recent deaths have reached our ears. We reported last week that Augusta Longbottom was on the run. Since then, we have received a message from her. She is still on the run, but healthy and alive.

"Many Wizarding families have been forced into hiding. The Weasley Family, the Jordan Family, the Barton Family, and the Bones Family have all been confirmed to be in safe houses but getting along fine.

“We now turn to Raphael for an update of the New Wizarding Order.”

“Thanks, River,” George replied. “The Ministry has begun to issue status cards for all witches and wizards. The cards will identify your name, address, and most significantly, how much magical blood you have. For obvious reasons, we have refused to register for the cards.

“It also appears that Royal’s words have finally come true and the war has begun to shift into other magical races. The Ministry has begun to seek out tribes of dwarves, centaurs, and goblins, among others for registration. Where once we attempted to live somewhat harmoniously with other creatures, the new Ministry are placing the proverbial shackles on their wrists and turning them into nothing more than slaves.”

“Thank you, Raphael...” Lee began.

I froze for a moment since it was my turn next. I would be talking to thousands of people throughout the Wizarding World. It was killer on my nerves.

“...Red.”

“T-thanks, River,” I said. I caught his eye and he pointed to his chest and mouthed the words *from the heart, Gin...* I cleared my throat. “First of all, let me say how honored I am to be sitting here. I have listened to this broadcast for months. It has kept me hoping like you wouldn’t believe.”

“We’re glad to have you,” Lee said, grinning.

“I have listened intently for news on Harry Potter and I agreed with Romulus. If the Boy-Who-Lived had been captured and killed, nothing would crush our spirits more than that single action. I am grateful that we know exactly where Harry has been for two weeks. Whatever he and his friends are doing, I know without a doubt that it will bring the fall of the darkest wizard in the world.

“I remember you asking Romulus what he would say to Harry if he knew he was listening, and if I have that same opportunity and if Harry is listening right now, I have a message for you...”

I knew what I *wanted* to tell Harry if I could speak to him, but most of those utterances I didn't want the public to hear.

"You've been gone for a long time, Harry, and we've been waiting for you patiently. We've persevered in your name and your memory, and we've supported you since the beginning. Whenever you need us, you can count on us. We miss you, and I love... W-we love you..."

I paused, wiping two tears away.

"Well spoken, Red," River said quietly.

Hours later, I lay in my bed, thinking over the broadcast, playing absentmindedly with my DA coin. Lee had congratulated me on a job well done and I hoped the audience felt the same way. In the darkness, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace. I'd be able to sleep well that evening.

The coin turned hot. It took me a moment to understand that a message was being sent. I scrambled for my wand, but when I groped for it, I dropped it to the floor. Grunting, I leapt from my bed and scrambled on the ground, searching for it.

Three simultaneous cracks indicated that three people had entered my room.

"Ginny," Fred called as he lit his wand, illuminating his, George's, and Lee's face. He peered down at me. "What are you doing on the floor?"

"The bed was uncomfortable," I said sarcastically. "Can you summon my wand?"

"*Accio Ginny's wand,*" Fred shouted, my wand flying from under the bed. He caught it and handed it to me. "Harry's back, Ginny. Get ready. We're headed to Hogwarts as soon as possible."

I processed the words in my mind, gripped the coin hard in my hand, and grinned wider than I had grinned in a long time. "Well," I replied slowly, "we'd be leaving a lot faster if you'd give a girl some privacy to change."

evidence had been interpreted correctly, Ron had felt the same way. Maybe they weren't going too fast. Maybe they just trying to catch up. I hugged her again and said, "Congratulations, Hermione. When's the wedding?"

"The end of the summer," she said. "And you, of course, are my maid of honor."

Umbridge's trial was a short one. She admitted with surprising enthusiasm that she performed all of the actions accused against her, but she pleaded not guilty for the charges against her. The trial took very little time and when the verdict was reached, she was given life in Azkaban.

Weeks later, the stone ceiling of the courtroom rose ominously above me. The newly formed Wizengamot were spread throughout the benches in the room. About 100 witches and wizards, which included my father, Harry, and all my brothers but George, sat in their places. Hermione and I were seated to the left of them, in the section reserved for witnesses.

Kingsley sat prominently front and center. To his left was Percy. To his right was Harry. Every member present wore plum-colored robes and attached on the left side of their chests was a silver W. Kingsley motioned at the door.

Dedalus Diggle and a wizard I didn't recognize entered the room, escorting a young man with blond hair and gray eyes: Draco Malfoy. He walked slowly between them as they led him to the center of the room towards the foreboding chair. With a mixture of disdain and awe, Draco scanned the staring faces.

When he sat down, the chains of the chair rattled but did not move to bind him. This was a mark of the new Ministry. Besides, with that many magic folk in the room, Draco, or any other defendant, would not be getting far.

Kingsley cleared his throat. "Criminal hearing on the 30th of May," his deep voice echoing off the high walls, "into offenses committed under the Decree of Human Relations Section A and Section B by Draco Carpathia Malfoy, resident of Malfoy Manor, London."

“Interrogators: Kingsley Reginald Shacklebolt, Minister of Magic; Harry James Potter, temporary Head of Department of Magical Law Enforcement; and Percival Ignatius Weasley, Chief Counsel of Magical Affairs.”

Kingsley looked down at the small folder of papers in front of him. He opened it and pulled the top piece of parchment out. He cleared his throat again. “Mr. Malfoy, although you were underage when these offenses were committed, due to the nature of the crimes, you will be tried as an adult. Do you understand this?”

Draco nodded.

Kingsley continued, “The charges against the accused are as follows: that he was part of a conspiracy to murder Albus Dumbledore in his sixth year of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry; the illegal purchase of a powerful necklace with full knowledge of its Dark Magic; the attempted murder of Katie Bell with the aforementioned object; the illegal use of the Imperius Curse for malicious intent upon Madame Rosmerta; the illegal purchase of a Class C Non-Tradable Substance poison for malicious intent; the attempted murder of Ron Weasley with said poison.”

There was a murmuring in the crowd. Draco appeared as if he was going to be sick. He looked down at the floor, refusing to meet the eyes of the ones watching on.

“How does the accused plead?” Kingsley asked.

Draco muttered something, but no one could hear. Kingsley asked him to repeat himself. Draco, who looked up this time, said loudly, “Guilty.”

Kingsley nodded. “You understand that, if convicted, you may serve a life sentence in Azkaban?”

Draco’s lip curled in its usual fashion, but instead of changing his mind, he nodded.

"The accused has not requested for any witnesses," Kingsley said. "But several volunteers want to state their case in your favor. I will allow this, but only if you wish for them to speak."

Draco glanced over at me and then back to Kingsley. He said nothing. Instead, he nodded and his gaze fell back upon the floor.

"Very well," Kingsley said. He looked towards us and said loudly, "Will the first witness please approach the stand."

Hermione stood up and came forward. Finding her seat, she looked on at the immense crowd, who shifted uncomfortably. They were watching a close friend of Harry Potter defend a well-known offender of the magical world.

"Will you please state your full name?" Kingsley asked.

"Hermione Jean Granger," she answered.

"You have volunteered on your own volition to plead Mr. Malfoy's case?" Kingsley asked.

"Yes, Minister."

"Miss Granger, will you explain to the Wizengamot the events you want known?"

Hermione nodded, looking a little nervous, and began her tale. She explained the night that the Trio was captured and taken to Malfoy Manor. She explained how she had been accosted by the Death Eaters and her life threatened. During her testimony, Draco refused to look up.

Percy spoke up. "Miss Granger, you stated that Mr. Malfoy refused to name you, Mr. Potter, or Mr. Weasley. Could it be that the accused simply did not recognize you?"

Hermione considered the information. "It is possible that Draco didn't recognize Harry. I had hit him with a stinging hex."

"Hurt, too," Harry replied to general laughter.

Hermione smiled and continued. "Ron and I were clearly recognizable especially to someone whom we had been going to school with for six years." She glanced over at the Slytherin. "Draco has more or less been our enemy throughout Hogwarts. I'm sure he recognized us and I'm sure he was trying to help us."

"Do you have any idea why?" Kingsley asked.

She nodded. "I do," she answered, "but there's another person who can tell that tale better than I could." She motioned towards me.

More murmuring in the crowd. If it was scandalous for Harry Potter's close friend to be defending such a person, imagine the controversy I would unearth. If Rita Skeeter had free reign, I'm sure she would love to twist my intentions to make it seem like I was caught in love between two men. How I would laugh at such a headline!

Kingsley excused Hermione and called for me. I confidently stood and walked the short distance to the witness stand. Draco did glance up this time as I passed him. We locked eyes and I nodded a fraction, indicating that I'd try my best to help him.

I retold my story. I explained every situation where Draco Malfoy helped me and every moment in which he supplied me with information, both beneficial to my sanity and my safety. I then explained how he had tried to assist Harry, and how he had saved my life twice during the Final Battle.

"Miss Weasley, do you not feel that the accused was using this relationship to further his own personal goals?" Kingsley asked.

I half-chuckled. "Yeah, I do," I answered. "I don't think he cares at all for me, or for Harry, or for anyone in this courtroom, but his enemy was Voldemort, just as everyone else's was. I don't think his motives matter. As far as I'm concerned, we were on the same side."

"Change of heart or not," Kingsley said. "His past still haunts him."

Harry cleared his throat. "This is a very personal issue for me," he said, and everyone muttered their agreement. "I don't like you, Malfoy, and I'm sure the feeling is mutual."

Draco looked up with a sick sort of smile.

“But I am eternally grateful that you saved her,” Harry said, pointing to me. He turned slowly to Kingsley and then the remainder of the Wizengamot. “He must be punished for his crimes, but I propose a lesser sentence. Probation and community service.”

“You mean he has to pick up the litter?” a woman called from the back.

Harry shook his head. “No. He has to help in the reconstruction process. Rebuilding Hogwarts and the Ministry and the countless homes that were destroyed.”

The Wizengamot voted and it was a close vote, but Malfoy was convicted of the charges and sentenced to community service. He never once looked up when they were deciding his fate, raising their hands in votes. It was almost as if he were ashamed of his actions.

Draco remained in his chair even though he was free to leave. Harry took my hand and led me over to him. When we stopped, Draco rose his head and glared at us. I wasn’t expecting a thank you, but a look of gratefulness would have sufficed.

Harry extended his free hand. “Malfoy,” he said, jaw clenched, “thank you for saving Ginny.”

Draco’s cold eyes slowly fell upon Harry’s hand and then rose to meet Harry’s eyes. Bit by bit, his light eyebrows formed a V, and he said coarsely, “I wasn’t saving her life. I was saving my own.”

Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy’s trial was the following day. They cooperated with much distain, but revealed many of Voldemort’s hidden supporters and where they could be found. Although Narcissa was granted a similar deal as her son, Lucius was unable to avoid Azkaban. He was given ten years with possible parole on good behavior.

While the Trio was off capturing the bad guys, I would visit Bill and Fleur. Bill, who was working for Kingsley’s new Ministry, was home

every night. Fleur, in all honesty, was actually pleasant to be around. She really had grown on me since the times I would call her Phlegm.

In mid-July, on a visit with them, I took a walk outside. The sea in the distance crashed against the rocks and the droning sound was peaceful. Before when I visited, storms had prevented me from exploring their property and I would spend my rainy days teaching Fleur the finer points of Wizard's Chess.

I eventually found what I was looking for. Beneath a lone tree, I located the mound of dirt that was almost the same color of its surroundings. At the head of the discoloration was a large smooth stone, with words etched into the surface. *Here lies Dobby. A Free Elf.*

He had been a loyal friend to Harry for years and I, too, had a special place in my heart for him. He had saved the lives of many I cared about, sacrificing his own so others would live on. He was brave in a way so unlike his kind, but that was wizards' fault that more elves weren't like Dobby. I thought about Hermione, who wanted to work for their rights, and I finally understood her cause.

"Thank you, Dobby," I whispered.

I dusted off a rock with my wand and sat down. I untied my trainers, took them off, and placed them beside me. Slipping my socks off, I bent closer to Dobby's grave and placed them beside the headstone. It would be one more article of clothing to signify that Dobby was liberated.

The summer sun peaked through the clouds, illuminating the area. Warmth surrounded me. I smiled, knowing it would all be okay. Eventually we would only need to bury our loved ones because they were too old, and not because they were killed in battle.

"Arry loved thees leetle elf." It was Fleur. She walked up beside me, hair tied back, but still looking perfect. In her hands, she held an envelope. She noticed me looking at it and remarked, "Ogwarts letter came for you." She handed it to me.

"Thanks, Fleur," I said. I held the object in my hands, thinking how odd it felt for something so normal and consistent to be delivered to me when everything in my life was in such disarray for so long.

"I 'ave really enjoyed you being 'ere," Fleur said, placing her hand on my shoulder. "I 'ope you feel the same way."

I smiled, knowing that I really did enjoy spending time with Fleur, as odd as that sounded. I reached up and touched her hand and said, "I do, Fleur. You're a good sister-in-law."

"I am 'appy to 'ear you say this," she said. "I tried so 'ard for you to accept me, but you only called me, 'ow you say, Phlegm..."

So she did know that I had disliked her. I felt ashamed. "I'm sorry," I said softly.

"You 'ave grown up very much."

A quiet moment passed between us, a connection, an understanding. If her statement had been made two years ago, I imagine I would have taken offense to it. Maybe Fleur was right when she treated me like I was too young. I *had* been acting immature. Looking back, she really was trying and didn't deserve my resentment.

"Aren't you going to open eet?" Fleur asked.

"Hmm?" I questioned, then realizing she meant my envelope. I felt the smooth paper in my hands, feeling a sense of nostalgia that it would be my last Hogwarts letter. I quickly ripped it open and scanned the letter.

"August 30th," I said, looking up at Fleur. "Hogwarts will be reopened. They're having a grand ceremony."

"That ees the day after Ron and 'Ermione's wedding," Fleur observed.

"It's going to be a busy week," I remarked. It seemed like their honeymoon would have to be postponed if they wanted to be a part of the it.

She pointed at the papers in my hand and asked, "What ees the other letter?"

I hadn't noticed that there was more. I shuffled the first letter behind the second. The familiar badge that Harry had been given in his sixth year fell to the ground. I bent lower and picked it up, showing it to Fleur. "I'm the Quidditch captain," I said, grinning wide. Going back was looking better and better.

"Oh!" Fleur exclaimed. "I'm so proud of you!" She hugged me tight. "I theenk Bill 'as a broom inside if you want to start practicing."

"Why don't you fly with me?" I suggested. "We could race." I was excited. It had been a long time since I had been on a broom. It would feel amazing, the wind ripping past me, my hair like a red cape. I was getting chills just thinking about it.

"Eet is not a good idea," she said, smiling radiantly. She took my hand and placed it delicately on her stomach. "You are going to be Aunt Geeny."

"You're pregnant?" I exclaimed.

Fleur shrugged. "We theenk so, but we can't be certain yet," she said.

My mouth dropped open as I bent low. I tried to find her bump, but if a child was within, it had not yet developed enough. How exciting! The first Weasley born in seventeen years! I was going to have a nephew... *After all, we are Weasleys.*

Two weeks later was Harry's birthday. We celebrated with a small party, much similar to the year before, minus important people. This time, the Minister of Magic was actually invited. After all the food was eaten and everyone else's gifts were opened, I presented Harry with my gift.

Everyone's eyes were glued to him at the presentation of the last gift. Most of the members around the table knew what I had gotten him. Harry untied the black ribbon, unwrapped the emerald paper, and held up a long white box. He lifted the lid and curiously peered inside.

He reached in and held up a long black arrow. He stared at it confused, searching over each part of it, and then pulled the note out from within the box. He read aloud, "*Because you've always been a part of the family...*"

"It's your official hand for the Weasley clock," I said.

He looked touched in a way I had never seen before. He gaped at it, then to me, and I saw so much love in his eyes. He leaned over to me and kissed me softly on the lips. "Thank you," he said in my ear, his breath causing chills to travel up and down my spine. Perhaps later I could give him *one* more gift alone...

"It was completely Ginny's idea," Dad said. "Of course, she asked my permission, but how could I refuse such a brilliant idea?"

Since Harry had the full day off for his birthday, I made sure he spent part of the day alone with me. When the party ended and he had some quality Trio time, it was time for quality Ginny time. I had a special surprise for him, one that I had forgotten about since the war broke out last year. I had only just remembered when I found James's old yearbook beneath my bed.

I was going to take Harry to see his second family vault.

Luckily, Kingsley had smoothed things over with the Goblins concerning the Trio's break-in. Although the goblins were certainly bitter that someone had broken in, some were equally impressed that they managed to escape.

When the vault door opened, the Goblin who had escorted us said he would be back later and to take our time. We watched the small creature scamper away and onto the cart. Turning our attention back the contents of the vault, we looked at boxes and boxes of unknown items. Having not been visited in seventeen years, they greeted us in silence.

"This is better than gold," Harry whispered, his eyes darting back and forth, trying to soak it all up in one glance.

"C'mon!" I said, grabbing his hand and pulling him to the closest box marked "Family Albums." We sat down next to each other and I pointed to it. "It's your stuff, Harry," I said. "You do the honors." I think I was just as excited; I wanted to "meet" Lily and James.

Harry's eyes sparkled as he lifted the lid to the box. He pulled the first album out and blew the dust off, revealing a brilliant blue cover with a superimposed red letter P in the middle. Taking a deep breath, he opened to the first page.

The first picture featured three people. The man greatly resembled Harry and James, right down to the messy raven color hair and glasses. The only difference was that he shared James's eye color instead of Harry's emerald. Beside him was a witch who looked the same age as the man. Her beautiful blue eyes complimented her bright red hair. In her arms, she held an infant no more than several months old.

"Harold, Lorraine, and James Potter," Harry read. He looked at me and smiled. "My grandparents!" he exclaimed.

I placed my index finger on Lorraine. "Looks like all the Potter men like their redheads," I said, kissing him on the cheek. "If you had known that from the beginning, your choice of a suitable partner would have been obvious."

"I wonder what happened to them," Harry said, turning the page. "Look!" he shouted, although I could see it just fine. Dumbledore was now in the picture beside Lorraine and James. "Do you think they were in the Order, too?"

I pondered the statement. "Maybe," I answered. "It might explain why James and Lily joined right after Hogwarts. Do you... do you think they died before James graduated?"

"Maybe that's why Dad stopped being an arrogant toe rag," Harry said softly, borrowing the phrase his Mum used so casually.

"If the answers are anywhere, they'd be here," I said, motioning all around me. "Unless you think they're too painful, then we don't have to stay."

“Are you mad?” Harry asked, turning the page and finding baby James with a broom. “I’ve never felt so close to them. I could spend hours here.”

“Don’t forget that this is *your* stuff,” I said. “You are allowed to take it with you. You’d have to shrink it though. We don’t have this kind of room at the Burrow.”

Harry nodded. “Kreacher’s been cleaning up Grimmauld Place. I can keep everything there...” He trailed off.

“Are you moving out?” I asked, disappointed. Although we really hadn’t been home very much this summer, I always saw Harry living at the Burrow when I went off to school.

“Not yet,” he answered. “I’m not ready to be alone.”

That was a satisfying answer. I turned the page and saw baby James with a toy Snitch. “I wonder how many Potters were born with the gift of Quidditch skills.”

“Speaking of gifts,” Harry said, smiling coyly, “I have to stop off at my other vault for some gold. Someone *else* has a birthday soon...”

I made a fake gasp. “*Who?*” I asked mischievously.

“And I know *exactly* what I’m getting you.”

“Oh?” I questioned, batting my eyes as flirtatious as possible. “What?”

Harry sat there with a smug look on his face, refusing to reveal his plans. I placed a hand on each side of his face and pressed my lips against his, using my best persuasive method.

“Not fair,” he muttered. “You cheat...”

It was nice to be able to enjoy a good snog. Harry and I really hadn’t had any prolonged kissing session since we reunited. After several minutes, I had officially changed my mind about Harry having his own place.

We spent another hour sifting through the photo albums, but never reached the other boxes. Later, Harry would have the entire stock of Potter memories and heirlooms transferred into the House of Black.

When my birthday came, Harry really outdid himself. He bought me the most expensive up-to-date Quidditch broom: The StarBlazer. It was lighter, faster, and better than the Firebolt, tested and approved by the leading Quidditch players of the day.

As Mum and Hermione started cleaning up, Ron stared hungrily at the broom. I ran my hand over the hand-carved personalized Hazel stick. The polish practically made the thing glow. My name was etched into the wood with the words Gryffindor Captain following it.

“Harry... you spoil me...” I managed to say.

“If you don’t want it, I’ll keep it for myself,” Ron said, reaching across the table for it.

I slapped his hand away and glared at him. “Mine,” I said defensively.

“Oh God,” Hermione said, walking up and dropping the Daily Prophet on the table beside Neville. “Guess what Rita Skeeter has in store next.”

Neville looked down and saw a picture of Snape glaring back up at him. He read the first paragraph aloud:

“After the blockbuster success of The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore, Rita Skeeter’s next book will be released on Aug. 30. Inspired by Harry Potter’s striking account on former Hogwarts Headmaster Severus Snape, Skeeter explores the truth behind the controversial personality. The book, entitled Severus Snape: Saint or Scoundrel, is scheduled to be released the same day as the Hogwarts Presentation Ceremony.

‘It’s not a coincidence that I’ve chosen this date to unveil my latest biography,’ Skeeter said, adding, ‘Rumor has it that Snape’s portrait will be placed in the Headmaster’s office that day. Before anyone can accept this questionable action, they might actually want the truth.’

Since Victory-At-Hogwarts Day, Harry Potter has been advocating for the alleged murderer of beloved hero Albus Dumbledore. 'It's strange,' Skeeter admitted. 'I happen to know that Potter and Snape hated each other.' She claims to have several sources that can confirm the tainted relationship.

'I'm here to ask the tough questions,' Skeeter said. 'Potter claims to hate all Dark Magic. Why is he supporting a well-known Death Eater? Well, I can't answer those questions here, now can I? You'll have to wait for the book...'

"Blimey," Ron interrupted. "After we finally convinced the Ministry, she's got to write this."

There was a knock on the door. I jumped up quickly and opened it. Luna stood on the doorstep, smiling at me. "Happy birthday, Ginny!" she exclaimed, hugging me.

I brought her inside, noticing Neville brighten up as she sat down. "Thanks for coming," I said. "There's still some cake. I'm afraid you missed dinner though."

"Dean and I had a fight," Luna said promptly. "That's why I'm late."

Neville shifted. "What about?"

Luna gazed at Neville, smiling curiously. "I have the opportunity to go to study abroad this school year. He was angry that I want to take it."

"Abroad?" I repeated. "You mean we won't even be finishing our seventh year together?" I was looking forward to it.

"That's exciting," Hermione said. "Where are you going?"

"The Gisele Memorial School of Witchcraft and Wizardry," Luna answered.

"That's where Bill had a pen friend from," Ron said. "Isn't it in Brazil?"

Luna nodded. "I'll be studying under Professor Newton Artemis Fido Scamander."

"That's right!" Hermione exclaimed. "He wrote *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. I forgot he was teaching there for several semesters."

"Professor Scamander is there with his family," Luna answered. "Daddy says they're searching for the Crumple-Horned Snorkack."

Hermione frowned, about to say something, but settled with something safer. "You'll get a great education if he's teaching you."

"You were right about Dean, Ginny," Luna said. "I find that I would rather be his friend. I feel bad though. I hope he's not suffering from a curse that makes all girls want to be his friend. He is a rather nice boy though."

I peaked at Neville. He seemed to enjoy this little bit of news.

"Have you all figured out what you're going to do?" Luna asked, looking around the table at each one of us.

Harry explained his plans. Neville explained how he wanted to open a greenhouse. I explained how I had decided to attend my last year of Hogwarts.

"Ron and I are going to sit for our NEWTs," Hermione replied. "If I pass, I'm going to join the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. Ron-"

"I'm not taking them," Ron said quietly, interrupting. Hermione and Harry both looked at him strangely. "I was, and I was looking forward to being partners with Harry, but I just talked to George today..." He stopped, blinking twice, and choosing his words carefully. "I reckon opening the joke shop will help him, but he doesn't want to do it alone..."

Hermione slid her hand into his. "Of course, Ron. For a moment there, I thought you were just afraid to take the exams."

"*Terrified*," Ron said, smiling, "but that's not it."

"How has George been?" Neville asked.

“As good as can be expected,” I answered. “Angelina has been with him a lot this summer. She loved the twins. Remember,” I said, beseeching everyone, “She went with Fred to the Yule Ball?”

“I wanted to go,” Luna admitted. “No one asked me.”

August went by quickly despite how busy we each were. While helping the last minute Hogwarts rebuilding, visiting multiple families, and attending the mid-August Ministry of Magic ceremony, Hermione, Mum, Mrs. Granger, and I had to scramble for time to plan a wedding.

“Omigod, Ginny!” Hermione squealed uncharacteristically three minutes before she walked down the aisle on her big day. “Is that a pimple?”

I inspected where she was looking at in the mirror. I took my finger and flicked it off. “Relax, it was a piece of dust,” I answered. “Besides, you’re a witch. We don’t get pimples...” At least, not minor ones like she thought she had.

She was beautiful. Her long dress was pure white, magically enhanced to reflect little bits of light to give the illusion that the one wearing it was glowing. Her hair, much like at the Yule Ball, was straightened and hung far down her back. On top of her head, Aunt Muriel’s tiara crowned my best friend.

“Hermione, you look amazing,” I said, hugging her.

“Just think!” she said. “Soon we’ll really be sisters!”

The door opened and Mr. Granger walked in, dressed in a Muggle tuxedo. “Honey, are you ready?” he asked, flashing a smile, his pearly white teeth almost blinding me.

“Yes, Daddy.”

The music began. I stepped into the aisle, my dress quietly billowing in a breeze. I felt the wind upon my bare shoulders, sweeping slightly through my hair. I met Harry’s eyes far at the front of the ceremony. He stared at me, a desiring stare. I’m sure if anyone was looking at him, they’d feel uncomfortable.

I never stopped looking at him as each step brought me closer. I noticed no one else, not Ron who must have been standing in his position, not Kingsley who was surely standing there waiting to keep the ceremony going, and certainly not the guests.

Weddings make girls go a little crazy. I'm not going to lie and tell you I'm any different. I badly, oh so badly, wanted this to be my wedding, having Harry waiting for me at the end of my long journey. I don't think you know how strong that feeling was. How long would I have to wait before my big day came?

I glanced back down the aisle, watching Hermione being escorted towards the front by her father. We would have to abide by certain Muggle traditions since many of the guests of the bride were Muggle families she knew from before Hogwarts. The crowd stood, gazing at the girl who was Queen for a day.

Mr. Granger lifted her veil, kissed her on the cheek, and gave his daughter away to a new man. As he sat down beside Mrs. Granger, I watched him wipe a tear from his eyes.

As Kingsley spoke, I gazed over to Harry, whose green eyes never strayed from me. Hermione might have been the center of attention that day, but Harry had only eyes for one witch, and she had red hair, brown eyes, and a deep passionate love for him.

"I love you," he mouthed.

I smiled radiantly, feeling an amazing sense of peace. After so much heartache, it was wonderful to be here, in this moment, bearing witness to my favorite couple. It was wonderful to be gazing at Harry from across the way even though I'd much rather be closer to the center with him.

This summer had been all about healing the world and healing our lives and we certainly had done just that. The Ministry had been reopened the week before and Harry had made a speech about this kind of healing.

"Healing takes a long time," he said. "I doubt we ever truly fully recover from the kind of wounds we received; I believe we more or

less just get used to the hurt, and some days are worse than others. But this is a good day and one more wound was healed today."

And as I continued to smile standing close to Hermione, I thought fondly of Fred and how much he would have loved to have been watching his younger brother marry the love of this life. Maybe he was. Maybe wherever he ended up, he was looking at us fondly, proud that we were not wallowing in our losses, but embracing what we still had, grateful that we refused to waste our days.

I mouthed back to Harry, "I love you, too."

I would be returning officially to Hogwarts in two days time. Tomorrow morning, Kingsley, Harry, and McGonagall would be presenting the rebuilt school. I would step back inside her grounds as a Seventh Year. I would be stepping on the Quidditch Pitch as a captain.

"I now declare you bonded for life," Kingsley said. "And I present to you..." he pointed at the crowd, "Mr. and Mrs. Weasley." He looked down at Ron. "You may kiss the bride."

"It's about bloody time," I heard Ron mutter.

Ron and Hermione kissed. I grinned wide, watching the newlyweds enjoy their first one as a married couple. Ron, my brother who had matured so much this year, and Hermione, my best friend who somehow had put up with Ron's immaturity, were officially married. They took each other by the hand and walked the aisle.

As I stepped closer to Harry and locked hands, I watched the couple walking together. Following after them, Harry wiped a few tears from my cheeks, tears of happiness, tears of joy, *tears of healing*.

Because it truly had been one more day for healing.

Author's Notes:

The biggest issue of this chapter is the rush of Ron and Hermione's wedding. Why did I do so? They've been in love for years! They've

waited so long to finally admit that out loud. I like the contrast that since they are finally together, they couldn't wait any longer. Plus, they were both out of school, both of age, and both finally in the same place emotionally and romantically. It's not uncommon for Wizarding folks to get married right out of school.

Chapter Nineteen: Letters from the Heart

“So Ginny, when are Quidditch tryouts?”

The voice had interrupted my thoughts. I was just about to walk through the Gryffindor portrait hole, thinking about that last kiss Harry had given me before he left only hours ago, before the welcoming feast had begun. It was now hours later, after the meal, and I was on the way to my dorm.

I turned to identify the voice. It was Dean, who was being flanked by Coote, Peakes, and Demelza. Each one eagerly awaited my answer for each one wanted desperately to get back on a broom. Studying their faces, I realized they were all part of the team that I had been on when we had won the last Quidditch Cup.

“You four won’t need to tryout,” I remarked and their grins were wide. “But we’ll need a Seeker and a Keeper.” And those would be the most difficult positions to fill because they would require two talented players.

“You could be Seeker,” Demelza suggested and the rest of the team agreed with her.

As we entered the Common Room, I considered her words. “I’d much rather be Chaser,” I admitted, “but I might have to be Seeker, depending on the tryouts.”

There was a commotion. Entering the portrait hole, Dennis followed Angerona into the Common Room. She looked furious.

“I wasn’t doing anything wrong!” she shouted.

“Yes, you were,” Dennis replied calmly. “All students were supposed to come back to their dorms, not run off with their boyfriends to Ravenclaw Tower.”

“Simon is NOT my boyfriend!” Angerona screamed. “All I wanted to do was say goodnight to him!” With that, she stormed off and retreated into the girls’ dormitory.

Dennis sighed and sat down on the Common Room couch. His shiny new Prefect badge hung loosely on the folds of his robes. He placed his head into the palm of his hands.

I took off after Angerona to calm her down. I found her ranting like a lunatic and threatening to destroy numerous possessions. After several moments, I had her relatively calmed down, enough to understand what was going on. As it turned out, she wasn't really angry with Dennis.

"Simon and I had a row," she said, flopping herself onto the bed. "We both want to try out for Quidditch, but if we both get on our teams, we'll be playing against each other."

"You don't have to stop being friends," I said.

"That's what I said!" Angerona shouted. "But he said if he lost, he would be accused of taking it easy on me." She grunted and punched her bed. "I don't care!" she said and then immediately asked, "Do I even have a chance at getting on the team?"

"What position?"

"Seeker."

She certainly had the build for a Seeker, but I had never seen her on a broom. If she possessed the same determination in the air as she did on the ground, she'd be quite the player. "We'll have to see you practice," I replied.

I told her goodnight and I went to bed, satisfied with the first day of school.

Dear Ginny,

I know it's only been five days, but I miss you terribly. I'm not sure how I ever survived last year around this time without you. The desire to be near you is so strong, especially after the summer we had. I

know it was sad, but I had you to help me through. Thank you for loving me.

I had an interesting week. Kingsley and I finally fetched the Dursleys. I would have been fine not going, but Kingsley insisted I deal with them. I'm glad I went though. Uncle Vernon is still the same. Do you remember me telling you about Aunt Petunia? I thought maybe she would have calmed down by now, but she's back to her normal self. And then there's Dudley.

He's changed, that one. You don't know how odd it is for him to actually be nice to me. He was asking all these questions about our world and about Hogwarts and about how I beat Lord Voldemort. I'd never thought I'd say this, but I think him and I are going to be friends some day.

And get this... ole Duddykins got married when I was away. He met this girl in the neighborhood they were hiding in and they were married 10 months later. And they're expecting their first child. I'm going to be cousin Harry.

Hermione and I are set to come the first weekend in October for our exams. She's excited, only our Hermione, right? I'm terrified, but at least I'll get to see you. I'll spend the whole weekend there, okay? I can even help with Quidditch practice if you want.

I love you,
Harry

Dear Harry,

How did we survive almost a full year without each other? I understand that we only dated a short few weeks, but seriously, it felt so final, you know? But now, after nine days without you, I'm in serious need of some Harry time. You better watch out, young man. The next time you see me, I might not be able to control myself.

That's amazing about Dudley. I'd like to meet him someday if he really has changed. And imagine... since he's related to your Mum, I bet there'll be magical blood running through his veins... what if the baby turns out to be magical? That would just make your Aunt and

Uncle's lives, wouldn't it? It's too bad Fleur and Bill ended up not being pregnant. Your cousin and my nephew could have grown up together.

I still can hardly believe I am in my last year of Hogwarts. It is so quiet without dark forces trying to kill us. Hagrid is getting along beautifully as the Head of Gryffindor. It is frustrating not having a set teacher for DADA, but once everyone sees it's no longer jinxed, I bet someone will want the job.

I would love for you to help us practice. I think the team is going to be a winning one this year again. All the old team is back except for you and Ron, of course. Dennis Creevey tried out and he was decent. He's our new Keeper. With work, I think he'll be amazing. And my little Angerona really impressed me with her Seeker skills. Give her a couple more years, she might be able to rival the great Harry Potter.

I CAN'T WAIT UNTIL OCTOBER! We have to spend Saturday together at Hogsmeade. We never got to do that when we were together. We could go to Madam Puddifoots, but I know how much you love that place after your date with Cho. Come to think of it, I'm not too fond of it either. I really don't care what we do, as long as we make up for lost time.

Well, I have Transfiguration homework to take care of. You know how Angelina... I mean, Professor Johnson can be when you don't practice.

*I love you, with all my heart,
Ginny*

Dear Ginny,

Hermione and I are still coming the first weekend in October and we're still taking the exams on Friday, but there's a slight change of plans. After our exams, they're going to hold an assembly where they want me talking about Defense Against the Dark Arts. It's a special lesson open to all Ministry officials and open to the media. I was hesitant at first, but I suppose it could be a good thing.

I never thought about Dudley having a little witch or wizard. That would be the best. I would love to see the faces of Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia when they realize that one.

I've been trying to convince someone here at the Ministry to take the job for DADA professor, but no one wants it. You're just going to have to deal with substitutes each week. I think Kingsley will be in sometime in November. Hey, maybe I can even come in to cover a couple classes. You better behave if I'm the teacher.

Ron is officially helping George out at the shop. I visited the other day, and the place was crowded, and Ron looked ecstatic at all the Galleons passing through his hands. The business is really flourishing. George, on the other hand, looked overwhelmed. He was making so much progress. I hate seeing him without a smile.

Your dad let me in a secret, and I'll let you know as long as you promise not to tell your Mum. He's almost done fixing up Sirius's old bike, and he's going to give it to me once he's done. I'll take you for a ride on it once I have it. It's nothing like riding a broom, but I think you'll like it.

Kreacher has Grimmauld Place looking amazing. He took all the House-Elf heads and Mrs. Black down easily once I asked him about it. I had all of Mum and Dad's things transferred there. Seriously, it's looking more inviting every day. I know you wanted me to stay at the Burrow, but I think I'm ready to move in with Kreacher. It's not like you're not allowed to come over. Besides, maybe you'll be moved out of the Burrow by this time next year.

I have to go. Your Mum is calling me for dinner. Andromeda and Teddy are here, too. I'll kiss Teddy for you.

I love you,
Harry

Dear Harry,

Why, Harry Potter, are you suggesting I move in with you? What kind of girl do you think I am? I can't live with you unless we're married... or are you officially proposing to me via love letters? Hmmmmm?

Don't get your knickers in a twist. I'm only kidding (unless of course, you're not kidding). You know how we witches are. Hermione and I have been planning our weddings since we were little girls. Now that I've found my prince, I hate waiting. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I love you more and more every day. I can't explain that enough to you.

This week, we have Hestia Jones as our teacher. I really like her. She's afraid that she'll be cursed if she stays any longer though. Do you know who we'll have for next week? So you as Professor Potter, huh? What if I don't behave myself? Are you going to punish me?

I think I know why George is slowly regressing. He spent a lot of time with Angelina this summer and I think that's what saved him from going crazy. And now he's away from her. I've talked to her. She cares so deeply for George. I think they may be falling in love. How amazing would that be? Make sure George comes for that weekend so they can see each other.

And I can't really be mad at you for moving out. It's not like I'm there much. But having a place all to your own will be awfully tempting for me. And quite frankly, Mr. Potter, I don't know if you can handle resisting me.

I can't wait until your next letter. Only a week and a half until I see you!

*I love you, with everything I have,
Ginny*

Dear Ginny,

I would love to be your one and only for the rest of my life, but I'm not proposing through a quill and parchment. But that doesn't mean it's going to be soon. Remember, you're still in school. And don't get any ideas about dropping out. Your mum would kill me. I think I'm better off alive if I want to stay in love with you.

I know how you feel. I don't want to ever let you go again. I envy Ron and Hermione sometimes. They're so happy together. I thought they

might be moving too fast when Ron told me they were getting married, but it's really worked for them. It won't be long, I promise.

Actually, your teacher next week is going to be your brother Bill. I thought you'd get kick out of that one. He and Fleur visited me last weekend. They said they were kind of glad that they weren't having a baby just yet. They want things to slow down before a child speeds everything back up again.

Angelina and George? That would be a fun pair, if George ever returns to normal. Come to think of it, he did feel like his old self the most when she was around in the summer. I can really be thick sometime, when it comes such things. George will be coming to Hogwarts next weekend. In fact, your whole family is coming. A little family reunion. Should be fun.

Allow me let you in a little secret. I don't think I could ever resist you. You have this strange power over me that I've never felt before. If you said fly, I'd ask how high. But that's what I love about you: even with that power, you never abuse it.

Yours, I love you,
Harry

Hi Ginny,

I would have sent you an owl, but witches and wizards in Brazil use toucans for sending letters. His name is Adamastor. He likes it when you rub his beak. Don't touch his tail feathers though. He'll snap at you.

Studying magizooology is everything I thought it would be. School here is very different, but I like it very much. I miss you all terribly, but I have met some wonderful Brazilians. They have made me feel very welcome. I didn't understand anything they were saying in the first week, but with the proper spells, I speak Portuguese now... or maybe they all speak English...

I am very lucky to be attending the school when I am because Professor Scamander will be returning home after this school year. He misses his wife and Kneazles very much. The only reason he was

in Brazil was to help his son, Leon Scamander, classify several new species of magical creatures and he ended up staying for two years. Newt will be writing another addition of "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them" as soon as he returns home.

Leon is also a very nice man although he is sure that the Crumple-Horned Snorkack doesn't exist. I told him to keep looking because Daddy usually isn't wrong about these things. Leon also has a very nice son our age. His name is Rolf. Rolf fancies me. He is handsome, but I feel bad thinking this so soon after breaking up with Dean. I don't wish to be called a scarlet woman like your brother called you.

I hope you're having a wonderful time at Hogwarts. Tell everyone I said hello. Let Adamastor rest before you send him back to me. He hates flying over water and the Atlantic is a big ocean.

*Sincerely,
Luna*

Dear Ginny,

I heard that Harry will be coming back to Hogwarts for his NEWTs this week and then hosting a special DADA assembly. I wish I could be there, but Gran and I already had a vacation planned. She's taking me to the Congo, where the world's biggest Herbology greenhouse is located. Tell Harry sorry I couldn't make it.

McGonagall asked if I'd be willing to substitute for the DADA class for a week since I helped lead the Army last year against the Carrows. I don't think I'm going to do it. I'm really not good at teaching. I can't see myself becoming a professor really. I think she said Cho might be interested in the job next year though. After all, she took her NEWTs to be a teacher, and she did fight in the Final Battle.

I'm so happy to have opened a greenhouse. It's flourishing, it really is. People have heard about what I did in the battle and have been coming from all over the country to make purchases. And guess who lives right next to me? Hannah Abbott. It's nice to have a familiar face around here. I miss everyone very much.

I'll try to visit the school sometime soon after I get back from the Congo. Tell everyone I said hello and that I miss them all very much.

*Sincerely,
Neville*

Friday had finally arrived. Where I would usually be eager for Professor Johnson's class, I anxiously awaited its end. Harry and Hermione should have been finished with their NEWT exams by this time. The remainder of the evening would consist of a special Defense Against the Dark Arts assembly led by Harry.

Since it had been a month since I had seen him, I wasted no time making my way from the Transfiguration classroom into the Great Hall. In addition to my boyfriend, I would also be seeing my family. They, along with several other Ministry and media members, would be present.

I entered the Great Hall. All the tables had been removed and the chairs had been placed in long rows. Hermione was talking excitedly to the family, holding a piece of paper up. Everyone was listening to her and I suspected that she was going over the NEWT exams.

Harry turned and noticed me. His face widened and revealed that perfect smile. I ran and jumped into his arms. Planting kisses all over his face and head, I exclaimed, "I missed you!" As he spun me around, I whispered into his ear, "Any chance we'll have quality Harry and Ginny alone time?" I looked at him and wagged my eyebrows seductively.

Harry frowned. "You know I'd love to," he whispered back, planting a quick kiss on my lips. "But I'll be here all weekend. We'll have plenty of time to celebrate..."

"Celebrate?" I repeated, only remembering his original reason for coming that day. "Did you pass the exams?"

Harry reached into his pocket and pulled a scroll out. With a proud look, he unrolled it. "I'm officially an Auror."

I took the paper in my hands, examining the certificate, running my finger over his name. "Now you're actually legally allowed to hunt dark wizards." I squeezed his hand. His dream was a reality. "Congratulations."

"Here comes Hermione," Harry replied, pointing beyond me.

I turned to face my best friend, and right beside her was Ron. She looked overly pleased. As she came closer, she held up the certification document, her name displayed proudly on the paper. "I was worried about the applied theory part..." she started.

"Honestly, Hermione," Ron interrupted. "Was there really any doubt?" They stopped in front of us and Ron grinned. "You two may have passed your NEWTs," he said, and then addressed me, "but the real accomplishment of our fame is yet to come."

"What's that?" I asked.

"You didn't tell her yet?" Ron asked, surprised, looking at Harry, who shook his head. Ron let out an exasperated sigh and reached into his own pocket. He handed me a Chocolate Frog.

I ripped open the packet and the frog hopped off before I had a chance to grab it. I glanced at the Trio, who was eagerly awaiting for me to keep going. I pulled the Wizard card from the pack and looked at it. I laughed gleefully as I saw Harry's face looking back at me. I flipped the card to the back to read:

<i>Harry</i>	<i>Potter</i>
<i>Currently Working for the Auror Department</i>	
<i>Considered to be the most beloved wizard of modern times, Potter is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Lord Voldemort, winning the Tri-Wizard Tournament, and slaying the only known Basilisk to have been seen in centuries all before the age of 18. Potter is known by many names: The-Boy-Who-Lived, The Chosen One, The Savior of the Wizarding World. Potter enjoys Quidditch and treacle tarts.</i>	

"Are you serious?" I exclaimed, pocketing the card and looking at the Trio.

“Hermione's and mine will be coming within the next two months,” Ron said, his voice full of pride. “That will be my finest moment!”

“Chocolate Frog Incorporated contacted us last week,” Harry explained. “They want to do a whole Order of the Phoenix editions.” He smiled wider. I suspected he was glad others were also receiving recognition. “And after that, they want to do Dumbledore’s Army.”

I stared at him, my mouth agape. “You mean I’m getting my own card?”

“You did lead Dumbledore’s Army,” Hermione reminded me.

Harry glanced over my shoulder. “I think we’re just about to start,” he said, pointing to the crowd. I looked over my shoulder. The student body was now all waiting in their seats, talking amongst themselves.

Hermione, Ron, and I went to our seats. As Harry introduced himself, Hermione nudged me. I glanced over to the where she was pointing. Among the people with quills and parchment was Rita Skeeter, also taking notes. I glanced at Hermione with a questioning look.

“I thought she was banned from Hogwarts,” I whispered.

“It's open to the media and public,” Hermione whispered back, “but she knows to behave...”

But Hermione spoke too soon. Harry was explaining the purpose of today’s assembly when Rita interrupted her. “Mr. Potter,” Rita said, “I have a question for you.”

“Er...” Harry replied, looking towards her and realizing who it was. “... Rita Skeeter... sure, go ahead...”

Rita placed her quill against her paper and smiled her best possible smile. “I was wondering if I could get your thoughts on the recent rumors circulating about Dumbledore.”

Harry shrugged. “I don’t know any recent rumors...”

"My boy," Rita laughed, "have you been living under a rock?" She sat back in her seat, touching the arm a fellow journalist. "Harry, what are your thoughts on the rumors that Albus Dumbledore was in love with the dark wizard Grindelwald?"

There was a murmur that rose up in the room. I frowned, looking towards Harry, who looked as confused as I did. It seemed that very few people in the room had heard this rumor.

"Rita," Harry started, frowning, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh please," Rita said, running her quill across the page and taking notes. "Surely it was obvious. Are you honestly telling me that you didn't suspect?"

Harry shook his head. "If it was something that was important, Dumbledore would have addressed that while he was alive." Harry breathed in, perplexed, and tried to remember what he was saying. "Um... any more questions?"

"I've got one." From the Slytherin section, I watched Julius Harper stand up, a smug look on his face. "You claim to hate Dark Wizards so much," he said, "but isn't it true that you can talk to snakes?"

Another small outburst from the student body was heard. Most of the students that were at Hogwarts when it was discovered that Harry could talk to snakes were now gone. Most of the new students had most likely only heard rumors. I rolled my eyes at Harper and looked at Harry, wondering what his answer was going to be. This DADA assembly wasn't going as planned.

"I can talk to snakes," Harry replied, to general astonishment. "But it's a common mistake to think all Parselmouths are evil. A great man once told me that it was our choices that show us who we really are far more than our abilities...."

"Let's see it," someone else called and most of the crowd cheered.

Harry looked towards us and shrugged. "A little help, Hermione?"

Hermione pulled her wand from her pocket and pointed it towards Harry. "*Serpensortia!*" she shouted. From the end of her hand, a long, black snake materialized and landed several feet in front of Harry. The girls of the crowd all shot backwards a couple meters in fear.

The snake slithered slowly towards Harry, tongue flicking in and out. Harry's head swayed with the snake, eyeing it carefully. Closer it came and Harry held up his hand.

"Stop."

It took me a second to realize that I had not heard the hisses that Harry had described to me before and I thought maybe I understood Parseltongue, too. Instead, I looked at Harry who was just as confused at the words and the snake's advances.

"I said stop."

Hermione raised her wand. "*Finite Incantatem!*" she called. The snake dissolved just as it was about to strike at Harry's legs.

Harry looked up at me, confusion in his eyes. I didn't know what to think. He looked up at the crowd, apologized, and continued without any more interruptions.

The next day, I walked into the Common Room and found the Trio sitting on the couch. When Harry looked up, he motioned me over. I instinctively sat on his lap. Ron grunted but said nothing.

"We were just discussing what happened yesterday," Harry explained. "I went up and talked to Dumbledore this morning. He explained."

"I know you're not disappointed to be rid of your ability," I replied, "but it is strange. What did he say?"

"I could talk to snakes because of the piece of Voldemort's soul inside me," Harry explained. "Since I'm no longer a Horcrux, I no longer can speak to snakes."

Hermione nodded. "That makes sense," she said. "That would explain why your scar hasn't hurt you since The Battle."

I pressed my finger to the lightning bolt. It used to be a prominent part of his forehead, but now the scar was fading and blending into his skin.

“That’s what Dumbledore said,” Harry answered. “He also said I should be feeling significantly better emotionally. The part of the soul inside me must have enhanced my sadness and frustration.”

“I remember our fifth year all too well,” Ron muttered.

I stroked his hair. “Do you feel better?” I asked.

Harry nodded. “Truthfully, I do,” he said, squeezing my mid-section and continuing. “Enough to take you out today. One full day of Harry-Ginny time.”

“What are we going to do then?” Ron asked.

Hermione shot him a dubious look and Ron turned slightly red.

I’m sure they were able to find something to do while Harry and I went on a date. Harry and I spent the rest of the day together, making up for the last month and enjoying each other’s company. Thirty-one days without my boyfriend really caused a stir inside me.

The next day, a pleasant Sunday afternoon, I took my team to the Pitch for practice. Harry had told me was going to meet me down there with a surprise, but when we arrived, he wasn’t waiting. Instead, Hermione and Ron were there.

“Harry’ll be late,” Ron said.

“Is he really going to practice with us?” Angerona asked excitedly.

Before I could answer, I looked off towards the entrance of the pitch and watched several old Gryffindor players walking up to us. Charlie, George, Angelina, and Oliver stopped right in front of us, each holding a broom. They looked around but did not seem satisfied with what they were looking for.

“Harry here yet?” Charlie asked.

I shook my head. "He was supposed to help us practice today, but he's late." Something was up. Everyone looked as anxious for Harry to be arriving as I did, but for different reasons.

"Ahoy!" came Harry's cry from above. The growing group of Quidditch players looked skyward to see Harry flying through the air, racing an unnamed person. They weaved through each other's path, descended quickly. When they met the ground, they immediately stepped off their brooms.

I was looking into the face of Gwenog Jones. The graduated players all looked as if they were expecting her. My team exclaimed excitedly and I realized they had no idea this was happening.

"Well," Gwenog said, gripping her broom, "we're not going to play a game with everyone gawking at me."

We were going to play a game with Gwenog? This could not be happening. So many questions ran through my head, but Harry had walked over to me, smiling, knowing he had done something right. "Surprise," he whispered.

"What are the teams?" Ron asked.

"How about New Blood versus Old Blood," Gwenog suggested, pointed to each of the graduated Quidditch players.

George shook his head. "I don't really want to play." It would be the first time back on a broom since Fred had died. They were always a team.

Angelina came closer to him and whispered something into his ear. George closed his eyes and nodded. After several seconds of considering, George agreed.

It would be my team against theirs. Oliver would be Keeper, George and Gwenog would be the Beaters, and Angelina and Ron were Chasers. Charlie and Harry looked at each other inquisitively, trying to figure out who would play Seeker. Charlie finally spoke and told Harry to be the Seeker. Angerona looked terrified to be playing against him.

The balls were up and the players scattered their positions. I had a feeling that we were going to get slaughtered, but their team each had five previous Captains, and each one was trying to command the others.

“Ron, pay attention!” Harry called as Demelza flew right past him and scored on Oliver. “That was your save!”

“Look alive, George!” Oliver called.

“Weasley!” Gwenog yelled at Charlie. “You’re supposed to be attached to the Quaffle, not looking for the Snitch.”

Charlie laughed. “Sorry, old habits die hard.”

We were ahead and I honestly thought we were going to win. Angerona had the Snitch in her sights, but Harry’s experience paid off as he snatched it up in his grip. Final score was 300 to 200. Angerona was just happy she didn’t embarrass herself during the match.

I landed on the pitch, near Charlie and Gwenog, who were bickering.

“I thought you were supposed to be great at Quidditch,” Gwenog said to him. “I heard some fascinating stories about Charlie Weasley from many who played with and against you. What happened to you? Old age?”

“I haven’t played for years,” Charlie answered. “And I don’t do Chaser very well. And age? Aren’t you older than me by a good five years?”

“A woman never reveals her age,” Gwenog said, shooting him a dangerous look.

I walked past them, overhearing Angelina asking George if he was alright. George answered positively. “It feels really good to be back on a broom,” he answered. He looked better than when he first had come two days ago. I wondered if it had less to do with Quidditch and more to do with the girl talking to him.

Finally, I came to Harry. “Well played, Captain,” he said.

“Thanks, Harry,” I replied, putting an arm around his waist to walk with the rest of the team to the changing area. “How does it feel to fly again?”

“Amazing,” he answered. He pointed to the broom. “How’s the StarBlazer treating you?”

I gripped the hazel wood in my hand. “I’ve never ridden anything so fast and smooth. You really know how to treat a lady.”

“Most girls,” Gwenog said, interrupting, “would prefer flowers and candy over broomsticks. I suppose you and me are from different molds than all those girls, huh?”

I nodded. “Thanks for playing with us today.”

Gwenog smiled. “I didn’t just come to play. You still have my card, right?” She reached into her pocket to pull another if I didn’t, but I nodded, picturing it on my dresser. “Well, I wanted to let you know that Amèlie Guerra, one of our Chasers, will be retiring in June. If you’re still looking for a position, I’ll leave the door open for you.”

My mouth fell open. I looked from her to Harry, who must have known this all. I was so grateful and happy with him that I could just jump on him right there and have my way with him. I looked back to Gwenog and replied, “Of course, Gwenog.”

“Good,” she replied, looking over her shoulder. “Excuse me, your brother invited me to Hogsmeade to swap Quidditch stories.” With that, she ran off.

I thanked Harry properly later on.

Dear Ginny,

Seeing you this weekend only makes me want to see you more and more, but Hermione says that absence makes the heart grow fonder. If that’s true, I don’t think you can measure how much I adore you. I’ll certainly be visiting next time you have a Hogsmeade weekend.

I ran into Lee at Diagon Alley. He is soon starting a permanent talk radio show of the Wizard Wireless Network. He told me if I see you before he does, I was supposed to tell you hello. He said he'd love to come see you play and commentate one of your Quidditch matches.

Your first game is coming up soon, isn't it? I don't think I'll be able to make it, but I'll try. Kingsley has some new laws concerning the treatment of Muggles that he wants me to take a look at. That is going to take up most of my time for the next month.

I'm glad you enjoyed Gwenog coming with me on Sunday. She mailed me yesterday and told me how much she is looking forward to playing with you again, this time on the same team. I'm proud of you. Your dreams will be coming true. If I'm ever fired from the Auror office, I think I'll try to join some Quidditch team. Then we might play against each other. I wonder who would win now.

Yours, I love you,
Harry

Dear Luna,

I'm sorry it took me so long for me to respond. I was busy this weekend with school and Quidditch. Adamastor was having a great time in the owlery anyhow, otherwise I would have sent you a letter three days ago.

I'm glad you're having a good time in Brazil. I hear the people there are some of the nicest in the world. I'm not going to lie, though, I miss having you around. I'm happy for you and everything, it's just weird not having you in class.

Harry was here this weekend for a special Defense Against the Dark Arts assembly. It started off a little odd, but overall, it went extremely well. He answered a lot of questions that people had about Voldemort and the Horcruxes. The Ministry has made the Horcrux an even worse criminal offense than murder. Sort of like a Fourth Unforgivable.

I really wish you could see the Gryffindor team this year. You would be proud. I also wish you were here to commentate again. That was

second on my list of favorite things that happened in our fifth year. I'll let you know how we do in the first game.

Fancying Rolf is not going to make you a scarlet woman. You and Dean are broken up. The two of you are allowed to date other people. He's been getting awfully close to Demelza anyhow. You just have to make sure you don't have feelings for him or anyone else before you pursue Rolf. I know how hard it is to be caught up with someone else and still try to date another boy.

Write back soon!
Ginny

P.S. Will you be home for Christmas?

Dear Harry,

Proud of me? Harry, you're the one making all my dreams come true! You took my heart and made that dream a reality. Then you bring Gwenog around and let her know that I'm still interested in the team. I don't know how you always know what's going to make me happy, but you do, and I'm so glad that you do.

The first game was yesterday. We played against Ravenclaw. I hate boasting, but we killed them. I'm so happy with the team I have. Angerona was amazing. I think she borrowed a few of the moves you did against her. I felt bad for her afterwards. Simon wasn't very happy that she caught the Snitch so easily from him. They're still fighting.

I talked to Professor Johnson again. I think she's beginning to realize how much effect she has on George. I asked her if she loved him, and I don't think she realized how much she did until someone said it out loud. Her face was adorable when she thought about it. Oh, Harry, I really do hope they work out. George deserves someone like her.

The centaurs paid us a visit yesterday and talked to Professor McGonagall. Firenze was with them. They accepted him back into the herd. Bane laid his bow in front of her. I guess that's a sign of peace in their culture. They even offered to teach the students once a week about astrology. I dropped that class, and now I wish I hadn't.

*Practice is calling! I love you more.
Ginny*

Dear Ginny,

I know what makes you happy the same way that you have always known what makes me happy. It still surprises me whenever I think about all the things you've done for me over the years. The sweater, the map, the Tri-wizard Tournament... even Cho (although I'm glad that one didn't work out)... every time I think about them, I love you more and more.

I had no doubts you'd win! Angerona was not an easy Seeker to avoid. I underestimated her ability in the air and she almost got the Snitch away from me. Maybe when she graduates, she'll be on the Harpies with you. She's a sweet little girl. Reminds me a lot of you.

It looks like George and Angelina are not the only two falling for each other. If your Mum's information is correct, Charlie and Gwenog have been spending a lot of time with each other. And to think, we have Slughorn to thank for introducing you to that woman.

It looks as if the centaurs have swallowed some of their pride. Firenze and Bane came to the Ministry, too. Firenze has been named the official liaison between all centaur races and wizards. It's exciting. Kingsley is doing such an amazing job.

Hermione has been in the process of passing house-elf labor laws. So far, she's been unsuccessful. It's hard to change everyone's minds at the same time. With more lobbying and campaigning, I know she'll be able to pass them. After Dobby and Kreacher, I'll do everything in my power to help her.

*Work is calling. I love you most.
Harry*

Hello Ginny,

Adamastor looks like he had a nice holiday in Great Britain. I was wondering if he had gotten lost in the ocean or took a wrong turn.

Toucans are not nearly as efficient mail birds as owls are. I miss our owls.

I really miss Quidditch. It was so much fun to watch at home. Only a small amount of Brazilians play. You'll have to send me some footage of the games. Maybe I can show my classmates and commentate for them and see if they like it. I can only hope.

I think when you wrote that I should make sure that I don't have feelings for Dean or anyone else before I pursue another bloke, the "anybody else" meant Neville.

I never spoke to you about Neville and my feelings for him. I think he liked me and I liked him a lot, otherwise I would not have kissed him, but I felt hurt that he didn't want to be with me. I know there were more important things, but we were there, together, and we could have supported each other. I'll always have a special place for Neville in my heart, but I think I've moved on.

I hope everything is going good with Harry. And no, I won't be home for Christmas. What about everyone coming to visit me?

*Sincerely,
Luna*

Dear Harry,

Gwenog and Charlie?? That's great! I can't believe it. They were fighting more than anything when they were here. Can you imagine Christmas dinner at the Weasleys? So many famous wizards and witches under the same roof. I'm giggling just thinking about it.

This letter is short because this week will be horrible. You don't know how hard NEWT year is. You skipped it. (Not that your alternative was a picnic) Slughorn has given us loads of Potions homework. I have to transfigure a dog into a series of animals that Professor Johnson randomly calls out, and this is the hardest thing yet. We're actually required to learn the Patronus now, too. (Not having any trouble with that, thank you very much! Happy memories courtesy of Harry Potter!)

I love you mostestest,
Ginny

Dear Fred,

We miss you terribly. Christmas just wasn't the same without you. We had the biggest snowfall in years, but it was so beautiful. Harry, Ron, Hermione, Neville, and I made a bunch of snowmen and bewitched them to have a snowball battle with us. It was fun. It seems childish, but after so much time fighting evil powers, I think we deserved some childish fun.

It's our first Christmas without you. Wherever you are, I hope your Holiday Season was as good as ours. We stayed happy with the ones that are still here. I think you would have wanted it like that. Besides, the house was packed.

Angelina has been spending a lot of time with George and she was over on Christmas day. I hope you won't be mad at this, but I think they might be falling in love. They have really been a great support to each other in dealing with you leaving. Every time she's near, George acts more and more like his old self.

And guess who Charlie brought to Christmas dinner? Gwenog Jones. Yes, Fred, THE Gwenog Jones, the captain of the Holyhead Harpies. They're dating now. Isn't that great? And I have a guaranteed spot on the team once I graduate. You're missing so much, big brother.

Mum has been on Bill and Ron's case about grandchildren all month. I think Bill and Fleur are more than ready and I wouldn't be surprised if they announced baby news within the year. Ron, on the other hand, is terrified. You should see his face when Hermione and Mum talk about it. They'll be great parents, but Hermione said they want to wait a couple years before they consider children.

Harry and I have been doing wonderfully. I bought him a pocket pensieve that is specifically designed to work with memories of him and me. Whenever he's lonely, he no longer will have to be. He gave me this beautiful Potter family heirloom. It's a necklace embedded with tiny rubies. Lily wore it. So did Harry's grandmother, Lorraine.

Harry and I have been talking about marriage recently. We haven't made anything official, (he still has to pop the question, I still need a ring, there still has to be a date, and he insists I have to be out of school). I love him, Fred, more than I can even begin to express. If you could come back for just one day, I would want it to be on my wedding day. You've already missed Ron and Hermione tying the knot, I just can't believe you're going to miss mine.

I included these Chocolate Frog cards. They're all the new editions that are out right now, Harry, Ron, Hermione, Mad-Eye, Lupin, Tonks, Aberforth, Kingsley, Mum and Dad, they even have yours out already! After all the Order of the Phoenix get their cards, they're going to start making special Dumbledore's Army ones. Can you believe it?

I really miss you. Tell Tonks and Lupin that Teddy is doing fine. Tell everyone else I said hi and Happy Christmas.

*Love,
Ginny*

P.S. In addition to this letter, I hope you like the trick flower I'm sitting beside your tombstone. Ron's idea from the joke shop.

Dear Harry,

Wasn't Christmas break wonderful? It really gave me a look at what the future holds for us. Spending time with you, just you, at Grimmauld was so nice. Thanks for making me breakfast when I "accidentally" fell asleep there. (Mum was so angry!) It doesn't even matter if you burnt all the food (although that was more my fault for distracting you). You looked cute with your apron.

I hate being back here. I want so badly to move out and start my life with you. And I'm not trying to rush you into making a decision, although I'm glad we talked about it over break. As long as we're both in the same place, I can wait until school is over to make any more important decisions.

Do you realize what will happen when we finally do get engaged? The media is going to go crazy with it. Imagine the hate mail from all the jealous girls who wish they could have a chance to kiss my

Chosen One? It'll be worse than Romilda Vane. But I say, 'Bring it on!' I can handle it.

Apparition lessons will be starting up soon. This year I can actually learn it. I don't know if I'll like doing it. Fred and George brought me along with them several times. Is it different when you do it by yourself? I'll probably be faster on the broom you bought me anyhow.

Now that we're back, the school work has picked up. All the teachers must think I'm a genius for all the work they expect me to complete. Don't be mad if I can't send you several letters a week. I wish I could, but if it keeps going like this, I'll be lucky enough to get you one. I'll still think of you every day though.

*I love you,
Ginny*

Dear Ginny,

It was the happiest Christmas I've ever had. It sure beat the year before, when I spent the holiday being attacked by Voldemort's snake. I will never know how to repay you or any of your family for taking me in as your own.

I hate being in this house alone. I can handle it, but it feels so empty right now. I just want you back here again, sitting beside the fireplace, and you wrapped so conveniently in my arms. Life makes sense when we are allowed to spend time together like that. I know where I belong.

You already know what my decision is. As soon as the moment is right, your wait will end. I'll let you in another little secret. I want this as much as you do. At Bill and Fleur's wedding, I couldn't stop myself from thinking it could be you and me up there. So all this will take is a little time, and both our dreams will come true.

Apparition feels the exact same way as side-along. The only difference is that you have control over it and not another person. That also means it's your responsibility to make sure you don't splinch yourself. It is a lot harder to learn than to just go along for the ride.

Letters from my end will be the same way. As long as we have a once a week back and forth, I'll be satisfied. I love waiting for your letters. They usually come after a long hard day at the Ministry. Good luck with all the studying. I'll be thinking of you when I'm not studying.

I love you,
Harry

Dear Ginny,

Ron wanted the first thing that I say to be “hi” from him. So before I actually get into the letter, Ron says, “hi.”

Harry has been keeping me up to date with everything that has been happening at Hogwarts since you returned two months ago. I'm very proud of you. I may not like Quidditch as much as you and the boys, but I'm excited to see what will happen at the school cup. If your team hasn't lost a game yet, I doubt you'll lose the cup.

Did Harry tell you that Dudley and Helen had their baby? The tiniest, cutest little thing. 6 pounds, 5 ounces! He has a small tuft of hair on his head that matches Dudley's hair. They named him Dominick. Teddy is fascinated by him. He's never seen someone smaller than him.

I still cannot fathom the change in that man. He sounded like such a horrid little creature when Harry told us stories, but now he is actually decent. They visited Harry when Ron and I were at Grimmauld. Helen is such a wonderful woman. Dudley is very lucky.

Ron let slip something about Muggles, and Helen surprisingly knew what he was talking about. She was delighted to hear that we were all wizards and witches. She said that her cousins were from our world. So that makes both Dudley and Helen connected to magic by blood. I'll be surprised if their child doesn't get that Hogwarts letter.

I would have sent you a letter sooner, but I wanted to put some great news into it about the laws I'm trying to pass. I'm sure Harry has told you all about the trouble I'm having with the house-elf legislation.

We had our first victory this week. The First House-Elf Civil Liberty Law is officially passed. It makes it illegal to treat them unfairly and maliciously. It's a small step, but that's the only way they will have full rights. I wish I could find another one like Dobby who would be willing to be the liaison between the wizards and elves.

We'll see you next month for Slytherin versus Gryffindor. I don't think it will be much of a contest seeing that you and your team seem to do nothing wrong this year.

Love *from*
Hermione

P.S. I think I saw a certain someone checking out a jewelry store yesterday with Ron, but you didn't hear that from me.

Dear Ginny,

First, thank you for what you are trying to do. I appreciate all your help. After all, you have always been the one that understands me the most out of our group of friends (besides her, of course).

I've taken all you have written me about her and I've given it a lot of thought for a long time. After hours and hours of pondering, I'm still not sure what to do about her. I can't keep doing this to myself, wondering what could have been. We were never in the same place at the same time and we kept missing each other. Now, she's thousands of miles away and once again, we're going to miss each other.

I love Luna and I will always feel something for her, but I can't keep feeling like this, especially since there's someone in my life who is willing and ready to love me back (I'll tell you all about that some other time) and someone in her life who is willing and ready to do the same for her. Maybe this is something we'll both have to let go.

Anyway, I will be at your last game in two weeks to see you win.

Sincerely,
Neville

Dear Harry,

Only seven more days and I get to see you!

Angerona and Simon have finally made up. It took them seven months to do so, but they're back to being friends, but it comes with a price. Angerona snuck out late at night to visit him, and was caught by the new Muggle-Studies professor, which by the way, is a really nasty man. She now has detention every night of this week, which means that she won't be able to play in Saturday's game.

We recruited Ethan Taylor earlier for Chaser and I am going to be Seeker. We will be having emergency practice every night this week. Wish me luck!

*Love, Always and Forever,
Ginny*

I saw the streak of gold flash past me.

I turned my head in the direction it went, watching the little golden ball fly directly towards the right end of the field, beneath the Slytherin Seeker. He didn't notice it, but I kept them both in my vision.

We were losing. Slytherin's Chasers were superb and without the team I had constructed, the perfect season was slipping from our grasp. Ethan wasn't a horrible player, but he was new to our level of playing, and it showed.

That had been the third time I had seen the Snitch, almost as if it were daring me to catch it, but I couldn't, not yet. If I caught the Snitch now, we would lose by one goal and I refused to lose, not after I had come so close. Two more goals and the Snitch... the trophy would be...

Demelza scored.

I looked for the Snitch, ready to catch it as soon as the next goal was reached. I scanned the direction it had gone, but it was no longer

there. My eyes locked with Harry, who sat with my family and friends. He mouthed the words, "You can do it."

Dean scored.

And I saw the Snitch near the ground. I dive-bombed as fast as I could make the new Quidditch broom travel. The Slytherin Seeker saw me going and was hot on my trail, but he was too slow.

The game was over. Gryffindor's only perfect season in twenty years. No losses. I stood there in the pitch alone for several seconds, watching the place erupt in applause. I held the Snitch high and waited for my team to join me.

I looked up at my outstretched hand as the crowds engulfed me. Coote, Peakes, and Dean were there first, lifting me up. Still looking at the Snitch in my hand, I saw something etched into the side of the ball. I brought it closer to my eyes and read five words.

I open at the answer.

"Wait!" I called out as the crowd quieted. The boys put me down and I stood in the middle of the circle, looking at eager faces. They each were wondering why I had just quieted them. I held up the Snitch. "What does this mean? 'I open at the answer.'"

I noticed Hermione peaking through the crowd. She grinned and she pointed behind me. I turned around slowly, as each and every person close to me watched on in hushed silence. As I stopped, my eyes came to rest upon Harry.

He was down on one knee, smiling up at me, the widest I ever seen him smile. The sun gleamed off his glasses, causing a sparkle in his eyes. I gasped, realizing what question was about to be asked by the love of my life.

I gripped the Snitch in my hands, the one that would only open when the appropriate answer was given. I didn't even need to think about my response. Almost in tears of joy, I anxiously awaited Harry to speak so I could reveal what I've been longing to say for months.

“Ginny,” Harry said, “will you marry me?”

“Yes,” I answered. The Snitch broke open, revealing the engagement ring. As the crowd cheered, I tackled my fiancé and pinned him to the ground, kissing his face and cheeks and lips. “Of course I’ll marry you!” I said, and then whispered in his ear. “What if I hadn’t caught the Snitch?”

He laughed loudly. “Have you seen yourself play this year?”

Chapter Twenty: A Tale to Tell

“Did Daddy really put your ring in the Snitch?”

I paused at my daughter's bedroom door. I was just about to extinguish the light with my wand. I looked towards the bed instead, seeing an eager nine-year-old face staring back at me. Her flaming red hair draped across her shoulders.

“You, Lily flower,” I started, pointing at her, “are supposed to be asleep.” I walked over to her and sat down, facing towards the girl.

She sat up, propping her back against the headboard, ignoring the fact that it was ticking past her designated bedtime. I wasn't angry with her and I wouldn't even be addressing this issue if I was. “I was asleep,” she said, “but then you got to the part about Daddy proposing.”

I stroked her forehead, attempting to place her back inside her dreams. “Yes, your father put it in the Snitch.” I leaned closer and whispered, “Don't tell anyone, but he's a romantic at heart.”

She giggled and nodded, indicating that she already knew this. I studied her face, still amazed that I always saw myself in her freckles, her eyes, her hair, even the way she was handling herself at that moment.

“Mum,” she asked carefully, “how many of the stories are real?”

I looked at my beautiful daughter fondly, noting how perceptive she was. Harry and I had always told our children most of the events of our lives in the form of bedtime stories, although we left out the more sinister details of the tales. We arranged it so they would believe that they were just that: stories.

When James had reached the age for Hogwarts, Harry and I sat him down and explained that the stories we told him were all real. Although it wasn't difficult to keep such things from him before that, once he reached eleven and left our watchful eyes, it would be impossible to keep them just as stories, especially when over half the curriculum features his father. We did the same thing for Albus two

months ago before he started Hogwarts. Now that they both were aware, we had instructed them to allow Lily to think the stories were fictional for just a little bit longer.

We don't tell them *everything*. What would be the fun in being a Potter child if you weren't allowed to solve some mysteries yourself? I remember all the letters James sent us last year, each inquiring about a new story he had heard about his father. "*You never told me Dad led an illegal defense group!*" he wrote to us once. And, of course, we hadn't told him the story of the original DA simply because we hadn't wanted to inspire his own trouble-making.

I pondered Lily's question and countered with a question of my own. "What makes you ask that?"

"I heard you and Daddy talking to Albus before he left for Hogwarts."

I was not surprised. She had inherited the need to know every little detail of the things around her, but it was shocking that she was addressing this so long after it had happened. We had spoken to Albus in late August. It was now almost November. I asked her about this.

She grinned sheepishly. "I was afraid that you wouldn't tell me," she said. "Uncle Ron and Aunt Hermione wouldn't, and neither would Grandma and Grandpa. No one wanted to tell me. They all said I had to ask you and Dad."

So she had been trying to weasel the information out of everyone else. I wish my family would have told me she was becoming so curious about the stories. I wasn't sure what to tell the girl because I felt she was still too young to know the truth. I would have to talk this over with Harry.

"Well, Mum?" she asked.

"It's too late to be worrying about this. Can we talk about it in the morning?" I asked her. With hesitation and disappointment, she nodded. I kissed her forehead and reached to fluff her pillow. My hand hit something hard, concealed by the pillow.

“Oh, Mum...” Her face was shrouded in fear, the look when she knew she was in trouble.

I pulled the mystery object from its hiding place. In my hands, I held a book, a very familiar book with a very familiar boy on the cover with a very familiar lightning bolt shaped scar. The title was “*Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*” by JK Rowling. Somewhat amused, I looked up from the book and into Lily’s eyes. She looked afraid, but I wasn’t angry.

“Where did you get this, Lily?” I asked her, knowing that I would probably find an empty spot in the book shelf in Harry’s study.

Noticing that I wasn’t about to yell at her, she straightened up. “I nicked it from Daddy’s office last week,” she answered. “Am I in trouble?”

I glanced down at the book again. She had a page marked where she had stopped reading, about halfway through it. Out of all our children, Lily had been the only one to have discovered the books about her father. To be honest, after all of my own discoveries of truth, I couldn’t help but swell with pride.

“No, Lily,” I answered, standing up and watching her snuggle deeper into the covers. “We’ll talk about it tomorrow, I promise.” I took a step further from the bed.

But she had one more question. “Do you think the Sorting Hat gave Albus a choice like it did for Daddy?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Why was he sorted into Slytherin then?”

I was quiet. I was true. Even after the little talk Harry had given him about choices, my youngest son had been sorted into Slytherin. Albus had not told us if he chose to accept the Hat’s decision, but I guessed that he had come to terms with the fact that the house didn’t matter as much as the person you truly were. Out of all our children, Albus was most like Harry. That meant as prominent as the Gryffindor traits were, the Slytherin traits were just as strong.

"I'm not sure," I replied, waving my wand at the candles and extinguishing them. "If you really want to know, you can send him an owl tomorrow." I reached the door and paused, awaiting her reply, but there was none. "Now goodnight, my Lily flower. I love you."

"I love you, too," she answered into the darkness.

I walked through the hallways of Grimmauld Place, where the memories of the last eighteen years were so strong. I passed by a picture of Kreacher, who had died of old age nine years ago, and passed a picture of Harry and me on our wedding date, three months after he proposed, and I stopped outside Harry's study. I gripped the book in my hand and I knocked. He invited me in.

The radio was playing softly, and I heard a familiar voice talking through the speakers. I paused to listen while Harry, who had been hunched over the desk looking through several reports, stopped shuffling his papers and lent an ear to the wireless.

"Since the Libel Act was passed last year, Rita Skeeter has been accused of 594 types of libel. If convicted of the charges, she will face insurmountable fines. If unable to pay the fines, she will face Azkaban.

"The controversial author, responsible for biographies on Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape, Harry Potter, and others, is confident she will walk away a free woman, but Hermione Weasley, the Department of Magical Law Enforcement official who is leading the prosecution, feels this may be the final chapter for Rita Skeeter.

"I will be keeping you updated throughout the course of the trial. This has been Potterwatch with your host Lee Jordan. Keep each other safe: keep faith. Goodnight."

The radio continued to play. Looking up from the papers, Harry greeted me with his smile. "Ginny, you didn't happen to take the Marauder's Map from my desk, did you?" He pointed a drawer on the left.

I shook my head. "Want to bet that one of our boys has it?" I suggested, taking a path around the desk to be closer to my husband.

"I'll have to have a word with George about which particular tales are appropriate to tell James and Albus."

Harry shrugged, noticing the object in my hands. "Doing some research for your book?" he asked, grabbing my hand and pulling me onto his lap. "You don't need that when you have the real thing."

I held the book up and smiled. "Not me, Harry," I said. "Our daughter has been catching up on some of her reading."

Harry's mouth dropped open. "You're kidding?"

I shook my head. "And she overheard us talking to Albus." His hand was massaging my back and I paused to enjoy. "Looks as if our secret's out."

Harry sighed. "I didn't want her to be exposed to it at such a young age," he said. "You remember how she reacted when we told her the basilisk story, and that's when she thought it was *just* a story."

I rolled my eyes. "She was four when we told her that one," I said. "She's grown up since then. Besides, once she wants to know something, she won't stop until she figures it out..."

I hesitated before continuing. "In fact, Harry..." I pointed my wand towards the door, and it burst open, revealing the flabbergasted expression of my only daughter. "Go to bed, Lily."

She squealed and bolted down the hallway, the little pitter-patter of feet echoing off the walls.

I looked back at Harry, who was busy laughing at the scene. "That's our Lily," Harry said, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes. He took the book from my hands and placed it back on the shelf with its companions. "We really don't have a choice, do we?"

"You tried so hard to keep the boys young as long as you could," I answered, snuggling deeper into his embrace. "It's just not going to work with that one. Shall we talk to her tomorrow?"

Harry nodded. We sat together in silence for several minutes. The rise and fall of his chest was comforting to me. I could fall asleep in his arms right there in the desk chair. Instead, he interrupted the silence and asked if I had seen the mail.

“Gwenog sent the latest Quidditch footage for you to review,” he said, lifting me in his strong arms and placing me back on my feet. “And Albus sent his latest letter. I thought you’d want to read it. I, on the other hand, have to sleep if I want to get up early for Skeeter’s trial.”

I wrapped my arms around his neck and kissed him. “Go to sleep, Harry, so I can have time to do all these things before midnight.”

Harry enjoyed another kiss and soon left the study.

I was alone now as I sat at the desk, the radio playing softly. A pile of mail waited for me so I took the first envelope, which was from Gwenog, and I opened it. Peering inside, I watched a scene of Quidditch she had sent to me. Now that I was the lead Quidditch correspondent for the *Daily Prophet*, I’d have to write up an article and mail it before they went to press later tonight.

There was a blur within, and in slow motion, I watched Angerona fly by and catch the Snitch in her eager outstretched arm. Her captain badge hung from the lapel of her Holyhead Harpies’ uniform. Closing the envelope, I decided to take care of writing the article later.

I moved the latest issue of the *Quibbler* to the side and picked up the letter beneath it. I read the familiar hand-writing of my youngest son.

Mum and Dad,

There’s so many things that I keep hearing about you guys! Dad, you never said that you, Aunt Hermione, and Uncle Ron broke into Gringotts and freed a dragon! Can I hear more stories when I come home?

Victoire has been watching out for me, but she said she doesn’t know how much free time she’ll have since it’s her NEWT year. I asked her about Teddy, but she got all red and refused to talk about it. What do you think is going to happen with them?

I did what you said to do about Scorpius and he's being a lot nicer now. After we spent that detention together last week, things have calmed down. No more midnight duels (it wasn't my idea! It was his! I couldn't let him think I was a chicken!).

Jillian Fields fell off her broom yesterday when a rogue Bludger hit her. If she can't recover in time for Saturday's game, I'm going to try-out. I think it's stupid that they won't let first years on the team (except for you, Dad, which you forgot to mention, too!). If only I could fly with the team ONCE, then they would see how good on a broom you two taught me to be.

James wanted me to tell you that he's sorry that he hasn't sent you a letter because he's been really busy with school. That's not the real reason though! He's spending all his time with Samantha Corner. Do you remember her? She's a half-blood with hair like yours, Mum. I think James fancies her.

Rose and Fred say hi!

*Love,
Albus*

I set the letter down upon the desk, grinning at all the information he had sent us. I adored receiving letters from my children. It reaffirmed that Harry and I were certainly doing something right with them.

The only piece of mail that was left was something I had already opened the day before. I picked up the stack of papers and read the note attached to it again.

Ginny,

I've been reading through the chapters you've sent me so far. You have some minor grammatical errors and structural problems, but overall, your auto-biography is coming along beautifully. I finished a whole box of tissues when I was reading the end of chapter 12. It's beautiful, it really is.

Have you figured out how you want to end it yet? That was the toughest decision to make when it came to Harry's story. Everyone

wants to know what happens to our hero. For your book, I was thinking you could end it with something personal since the whole thing has such a private feel to it. Maybe your marriage ceremony... or the birth of one of your children.

You can see the problem with ending a story like this. I'm sure you'll think of something. Owl me if you have any problems.

Joanne Rowling

Holding the manuscript of my auto-biography, I pondered how to conclude. I flipped open to the first chapter and noticed the red marks from Joanne's quill, the places where corrections were made. I close it again and placed it off to the side. If I started looking over it this late, I would lose track of time and keep reading, and then I wouldn't have time to write my article.

Besides, I already knew the conclusion I wanted.

After spending time reviewing the Quidditch matches, I wrote up the articles for the next issue of the *Daily Prophet*. I yawned as I gave the envelope to our owl and sent her out the window into the starry night.

When I entered the bedroom minutes later, I attempted to be as quiet as I possibly could. Harry really did need his rest, but as soon I sat down on the bed, I felt a hand slip into my own and his loving voice whisper my name. I kicked off my slippers and lay down next to him.

"Finished the novel yet?" he asked.

"No," I answered. I turned over on my side, facing him, the darkness providing a cover. "And no, Harry, you aren't allowed a sneak peak." He had been begging me since I began the project for a look into the words of Ginevra Molly Potter, but I had refused. He was going to have to wait until the end.

"Just a small one....?"

"Not a chance," I interrupted, closing the gap between us and kissing him passionately. He soon forgot about his request and lost himself in

my sweet distraction. After several minutes, I pulled away, breathless and flustered.

“You must be feeling better,” he whispered, referring to that morning when I had vomited in the bathroom. In fact, I had been experiencing the same thing for most of the week. Harry had been worried and I had visited the Healers earlier that day.

“I am,” I replied. “I visited Ernie at St. Mungo’s.”

“Did he say what’s making you sick?” he asked, placing a loving hand on my cheek.

I nodded.

I took his hand and held it tight. Smiling at him, I slowly lowered our entwined fingers downwards, against my naked neck, over my rounded chest, and stopped upon my firm abdomen. I delicately spread his fingers, causing his palm to lie flatly upon my stomach.

“Do you want another boy or another girl?”

--

I’m sitting here now at Harry’s desk. It’s about eleven o’clock in the morning and I’ve been awake for about four hours. I spent all morning constructing this chapter, making sure everything made sense before I have to package it away and send it to Joanne Rowling.

While I was writing, Lily came into the room. She stood here and asked if it was okay if she hoped for a baby sister. As I marveled at her eaves-dropping abilities, I confirmed that it would be perfectly acceptable. My mind wandered, thinking how Dora would be a beautiful name for a daughter and how Arthur would be a strong name for a son.

I watched Lily’s chocolate eyes dart around the room, her gaze falling on the book shelf behind me. Turning, I reached into the shelf and pulled a book from the row. Her page was still marked where she had stopped reading. I handed her the book. She grinned eagerly and sat down on the floor immediately to finish it.

You'll find me in that book as Ginevra Molly Weasley. When I was that little girl, I heard all the stories of Harry Potter, how he was a great wizard, how he was the savior of the wizarding world, and even as a little girl, I felt an attachment to this hero. When I was ten years old, I fell in love with the boy from my bedtime stories.

They don't call me Weasley anymore. I go by Potter. Somehow, for some reason, the champion of the stories became the champion of my heart, and he, too, fell in love with me. Nearly two decades have passed since I took his name, and every moment, from our wedding day to our children's births, has been remarkable with the man I've always loved.

Every champion needs a story. Every hero has a tale to tell. But for every savior, there is someone in the background who gives him his real reason to fight, and they, too, have a tale to tell. I don't know if anyone will bother reading what I have to say, but this is my story, told through my eyes, expressed with my words, and written with my love.

As I write these closing statements, I think about what the future holds. I was once a well-known Quidditch captain married to the most famous wizard in the world. When I became pregnant with James, I gave up that life to embrace a more fulfilling and meaningful one. As much as I loved riding a broom, I love being a mother more.

As I sit here and write this, watching my daughter discover the secrets of her father, growing a child deep inside me, I dare you to find one person who could possibly be as happy as I am right now.

The stories that influenced/inspired this story:

The Harry Potter Series by JK Rowling
 "Snitch" by Hettie Huffleboffer (HPFF)
 "Turning the Corner" by GraceHasVictory (HPFF)
 "If only" by Eressea (PhoenixSong)
 "Smart Girl, that Hermione" by fitzette (PhoenixSong)
 "The Invitation" by Task (HPFF)
 "Herm-Own-Inny" by Lily Evans (HPFF)
 "Not Harry" by Hanabi (Mugglenet)
 "After the Library" by PirateGinny (PhoenixSong)
 "The Expectation of Circumstance" by Starbuck 23 (PhoenixSong)
 "The Quibbler Quiz" by BasilM (PhoenixSong)
 "A Summer Friend" by greywolf (Mugglenet)
 "Not in a Good Mood" by critmo (Phoenixsong)
 "It's the Little Things" by AvidHPReader (Phoenixsong)
 "Not in a Good Mood 3" by critmo (Phoenixsong)
 "Quidditch in the Snow" by Bring and Fly (Phoenixsong)
 "Dumbledore's Man" by Aggiebell (Phoenixsong)
 "Moment of Clarity" by Melindaleo (PhoenixSong)
 "Visiting Har- I mean Ron" by Two Drunken Elves (Fanfiction)
 "Seamus Day Out" by JustSuper (HPFF)
 "My Fifth Year" by EROD37 (HPFF)
 "Treacle Tarts, A Broomstick Handle, and Ginny" by Melindaleo (PheonixSong)
 "A Thousand Patronuses" by belladonna803 (Mugglenet)
 "Howarts, A Romance" by rgfanfreak (HPFF)
 "His Best Source of Comfort" by Melindaleo (PhoenixSong)
 "Just Enough Light" by fitzette (PheonixSong)
 "Maybe That's Why I Like You So Much" by kalaezoe (Mugglenet)
 "Lifeline" by misselthwaite (PhoenixSong)
 "Ginny's Hope" by taffygirl (HPFF)
 "Thru Ginny's Eyes" by pinkpirategirl (Fanfiction)
 "Persistence" by Kegel (Fanfiction)
 "Beloved of a Hero" by tyldari archer (HPFF)
 "Promise" by nesserz (Fanfiction)
 "The Gift of Instinct" by Emerald Olive (Fanfiction)
 "The Battle in our Hearts" by kishiee (Fanfiction)
 "While you were gone" by puttykat13 (Fanfiction)
 "The Lives Between" by Alianneoftortall (Fanfiction)
 "The Year that went by" by potionslover (Fanfiction)

"It's just you against the world" by Ravii (HPFF)
"I Wear Black" by princessenr1 (HPFF)
"Deleted Scenes" by hplove01 (FanFiction)
"The Deathly Hallows: The Other Story" by MikeyB89 (Fanfiction)
"In the Rubble of her Childhood" by dreamcoatmom (mugglenet)
"The Final Battle: Ginny's POV" by EmeraldFire512 (Fanfiction)
"Sunrise" by GhostWriter (PhoenixSong)
"Here For You" by Boombands (Fanfiction)
"Towards King's Cross" by everylittlething (PhoenixSong)
"Moving On" by hplove01 (Fanfiction)
"Harry Potter and the Eternal Promise" by Gryphinwurm7 (Fanfiction)
"Harry Potter's New Dawn" by Locquacius Burbage the Scribe (HPFF)
"Harry Potter and the New Beginning" by muggleinlove (Fanfiction)
"Learning to Live Again" by coldwizard (Fanfiction)

I started reading fanfiction five days before Deathly Hallows came out. I was starving for Harry Potter and these sites were the only thing to appease my hunger for a few moments, but it was like eating a pea compared to the full course JK Rowling was about to offer me. When I was done reading DH, I decided I would stop reading fanfiction.

That's when I found her story. In the archives of Harrypotterfanfiction, I found Hettie Huffleboffer's "Snitch." It told the second half of *Order of the Phoenix* through the eyes of Ginny Weasley. I was hooked. After completing that, I began my wild search of Ginny-POV stories of each and every book.

But something was wrong. NO ONE had taken the time to write it and the more I searched, the more I realized that it wasn't there.

I started to collect the fanfictions that were good and filled in the many missing moments. My original plan was to put these all together in a seamless story and present it to the world of fanfiction as the love child of many, many authors. As I acquired them, I began to form my own story in my mind, with my own missing moments, and my own way of seeing them.

Eventually, I had the first chapter planned in my head and I was defeated by my own creative mind. I never intended to write a fanfiction story, but the more I thought about it, the more I couldn't

escape it. The inevitable had come: I was going to become fanfiction author.

I tried not to be sucked in. I really did.

There are many people I need to thank for this story and the first are all the authors mentioned above and the stories they wrote. Without them, I would not have been inspired to write my own story. If you ever get a chance to locate them, read through the tales that influenced my writing.

My Betas... Snowyowl7: You were only around for two chapters, but you did a great job. EmeraldFire512: You've been around since I gave the call for a Beta. You have been a great asset to this story. Thank you sticking with me. GinnyGuerra: If I could give out an award for most dedicated Beta, you would win that award. You went above and beyond your call of duty, journeying back to the fourteen previous chapters and doing the Beta work for them (a process that took over a month and a half to complete). I'm grateful for everything you three have done for me.

Gryphinwurm7: You have been my nitpicker and favorite reviewer for this story. You never let me be satisfied with a chapter (which is a good thing) and you never stopped challenging me to be a better writer. You never cease to amaze me with the amount of detail you have acquired about the world of Harry Potter. You have picked out the mistakes and overlookings that a normal Fanfic'er would never think twice about, and your reasoning and explanation for those things usually convince me to change those details. I don't know how you do it, but I'm grateful that you do.

GiseleWeasley: My wonderful Brazilian translator for this story. Since your request on chapter 15, you have been working diligently translating the chapters into Portuguese. You have even converted some of *your* fans into some of *my* fans. It's been truly a pleasure conversing with you about not only Harry Potter related topics, but our lives in general. You've been the greatest.

And to everyone else who has reviewed this story and encouraged me. I can't name you all, but know that I appreciate every single one of you. Without readers, stories would mean nothing.

JK Rowling: I find it very unlikely that you will ever read this. If you so happen to be clicking randomly through fanfiction and stumble across mine, I hope you aren't offended that I've used you as a character (and revealed the secret that Harry is real). I hope that you think I've done Ginny justice, as well as your other characters. I have tried extremely hard to keep your characters as you have invented them. Thank you for creating this world. (And if you so happen to think my story a good one, I wouldn't mind lending you the idea for a certain fee... hint hint)

Little Known Facts about:

Angerona Barton (the first year that Ginny took under her wing in my version of DH): I took her name from the Roman god of Secrets.

Simon Samson (the first year that Michael took under his wing): I took his names from the Bible. Simon Peter (of the New Testament) and Samson (from the Old Testament).

Oghma (the owl that Luna mentions that helps deliver the *Quibbler*): I took the name from the Celtic God of communication and writing.

Adamastor (the toucan that Luna uses to send mail to Ginny): the name of a character invented in a poem by a Portuguese poet that represented the forces of nature working against ship navigators.

Sarimanok (Hagrid's good luck chicken in chapter 4): a mythological bird from the Philippines.

Raphael (George's name on Potterwatch): I have Gryphinwyr7 to thank for the suggestion. Raphael was a saint... Get it, holy... holey...

Protermortis (the potion that Slughorn had them make in chapter 15): It is derived from two Latin words, "propter" which means near or close, and "mors mortis" which means death.

I've always thought that the Trio of Neville, Luna, and Ginny as the Silver Trio. In the same way that the Golden Trio had all of the Ollivander cores (Harry-Phoenix feathers, Hermione-dragon heartstring, Ron-unicorn hair), I wanted the Silver Trio to emulate that.

(Ginny-Phoenix feathers, Luna-dragon heartstring, Neville-unicorn hair).

Although their first names (Delia and Ethan) are completely random, I borrowed their last names (Regal and Taylor) from two British WWE wrestlers.

Some of the names in the last two chapters honor certain contributors to this story.

My name is Justin. I'm 22 years old and a senior at Bloomsburg University. I have a Facebook, Myspace, and two Xanga accounts (one for blogging, one for poetry). If you'd like to check it out, let me know.

What's next for The JeaLouS One?

I know you've all been asking me to continue the post-DH nineteen year gap, but I've got to stick by my original plan. Remember what I said further up? The prevailing reason why I wrote this Ginny-POV fanfiction is that I felt her story was lacking. With the nineteen year gap, I've read some pretty decent to really great stories that I'm satisfied with. Another reason why I don't want to write it is that a good story requires some kind of conflict and resolve of that conflict to move the plot along. I don't have the heart to make such conflict when, as good ol' JK puts it, "All was well."

What are my plans?

I'm taking a well-deserved break, but I don't think this will be the last time you'll hear from me. I have some ideas brewing in this head of mine, and although they're not as strong as the Ginny narrative, there might come a time when I'll need to release the story from my literary mind. And I know you'll be waiting when I'm ready.

The first idea is a time-travel story. Much like the Ginny-story, I have read some good ones, but they seem to all be the same idea garbled up and spit out as new by a different writer. I want to present a different idea, but to give you a preview would reveal major plot line and plot twists. If anyone has any good ones, send them my way.

I would like to do another “point of view” story sometime. Out of all the characters in the Harry Potter world, I would love to write a Draco-POV. He is such a complex yet tragic individual. While reading and writing about him, he just screams for a story to be told and I think my poetic mind could do wonders for him.

But that is a big MAYBE. It would require the same amount of devotion and research as I’ve been doing, and I don’t know if I want to dedicate my time and efforts to another big-scale project like that.

Thank you once again for sticking with me. If you care about the story, tell a friend to read it. It would make my day to eventually break 1000 reviews, although that is not the reason I wrote this.

thejealousone

The end

Frequently Asked Questions:

Keep in my mind that some of these answers are strictly opinion. I will gladly take your opinion seriously if you feel differently than I do. I only ask you to provide me a reasonable argument and/or evidence from canon to support your opinion, theories, and thoughts. Many reviewers have swayed my opinion on certain matters because their way of thinking makes far more sense than my own.

This page is just so you all know that I don't just randomly do things. I have good reasons for all the things I did in this story.

You're a GUY?

In fact, yes I am (at least, as far as I know). When I started reading (and eventually writing) fanfiction, I didn't realize how female-dominated this forum was. I suppose I should have guessed it, I mean, with all the pennames out there (GinnyGurl44, IloveHarry99, Sirius-is-hot-1234, you get the idea). I was simply someone with an idea who needed to put it somewhere. I am first and foremost a writer. And yes, I *can* write romantic scenes. Once again, I had no clue that a guy being able to write romance would be the discovery of the century (What about Nicolas Sparks? William Shakespeare anyone?).

Okay, you're a guy that can write romantic scenes... are you gay?

Nope. Sorry to all you homosexual gentlemen, but this fanfiction writer likes the ladies.

Are you JK Rowling in disguise?

I know it is intended to be a compliment when readers tell me that I sound so much like JK Rowling, but I dislike it very much. Don't get me wrong, she is a fantastic writer, but I DON'T write like her, I don't have the same style, and our story-telling is completely different.

The only kind of Rowling-compliment that I enjoy is when I'm told that I really have her characters down. I tried very, very hard to keep them as she created them.

You must be Ginny Weasley then. right??

I laughed a little bit when I read this, but I think I'll leave this one open for debate.

Some of the characters don't feel like the real characters... and some of the scenes don't mesh well with canon... explain that!

I researched the characters with HP Lexicon and Wikipedia. I had my trusty Harry Potter books right beside me at all times while I wrote this story. I compared what I had versus what was in the books to make sure each character was accurately portrayed. I had Betas and nitpickers picking this story apart. If you think I haven't done a 100 percent great job... you're right. I haven't. There is only one person who could ever 100 percent accurately portray the Harry Potter characters and that is JK Rowling. She can do this because they ARE her characters, not mine. I tried though. Trust me. I tried.

Why did you alter the timeline?

When I combined the Harry Potter universe with the real-life publication of the books, I ran into a problem with the timeline. I made a hard decision and decided to ignore what is obviously known about the series. I need **you** as a fan to also ignore the timeline in order to make this chapter work. By altering the timeline by 10 years, I don't believe it affects this story or the original cannon in any way. The characters, the events, the emotions, and the personalities are still the same. (It just wouldn't have worked with the first and last chapter otherwise. The rest of the story carried on as if nothing had been altered.)

To clear things up, here is the new time:
(any past event directly affected by this timeline is also altered by ten years)

1970:	Harry	born
1988:	Voldemort's defeat in Deathly	Hallows
1996:	JK Rowling comes to	Harry Potter
1997:	ALL the books are released in the	Wizards World
...	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone released in the	Muggle World
2007:	Deathly Hallows released in the	Muggle World

...: Ginny starts writing this book (my story) right after the scene in the epilogue

What about that scene in the epilogue? It doesn't make sense for it to happen in your altered version.

The scene in the epilogue still has happened, but you're right, with the altered version, it doesn't make sense for it to be included in Deathly Hallows. We can fix that with one of two ways: It was added later, or we can pretend that it wasn't included in the publication. Quite honestly, that is a minor detail that really doesn't affect the way this story happens, but still a great catch.

Doesn't Ginny sound too mature for being so young?

For the most part, this is a matter of interpretation. I have not included dialogue or thoughts from Ginny that I could not see my younger nephews, nieces, and cousins saying. Also, don't forget that an older, adult Ginny is retelling this story.

Why did you consider Ginny for Slytherin?

In Ginny's normal state of mind, I think she would have been a shoe-in for Gryffindor, but she was already under the influence of Voldemort when the Sorting Hat was placed on her head. Although Harry clearly had some great Slytherin qualities, the Horcrux in Harry was surely a major component in the Hat's consideration for Harry's placement in Slytherin. I am convinced that Voldemort's influence on Ginny would have worked similarly.

If you're attached to canon so much, why did you invent your own character, Delia Regal?

As much as I hated inventing a character not found in the Harry Potter series, Miss Rowling left no choice. She never said who Ginny was rooming with, who Ginny was spending time with, and many other social habits of Ginny. Delia Regal is not an amazing character, but I hope you have accepted her as much as you have accepted this story.

How can Hermione's worst memory be her grandfather's death?

I know you have to see death to see a Threstral, but I didn't say that Hermione saw her grandfather die, just that the particular night that he died is her worst memory.

You write in chapter four "We suspect that Black is smart enough to stay off Hogwarts ground as much as possible. He must have thought everyone would be distracted on Halloween." If you compare that with PoA ch. 9, JK Rowling writes "I reckon he's lost track of time, being on the run," said Ron. "Didn't realize it was Halloween. Otherwise he'd have come bursting in here." Explain.

Easy enough, this is two different opinions of what is happening. My portion is what the twins have been thinking, based on their knowledge of what they've seen on the map. JK Rowling's portion is Ron's opinion. Not too farfetched that brothers disagree.

Do you really think Ginny could have resisted the Imperius Curse?

Yes, I do. The diary embedded with Voldemort's soul was a strong piece of dark magic designed specifically to control the host that bonds with it. If Ginny was able to resist such an extraordinarily powerful object, the Imperius Curse should have been a piece of cake.

Aren't you selling Neville's emotions for Ginny a little short?

I may have overlooked Neville's feelings. It's just that I didn't want YET another boy crushing on Ginny. There was Colin (from my story), Michael, Dean, Harry (from canon), Peakes and Coote (from my story). I wanted (and needed) her to have a platonic male friend.

Besides I feel that Hermione was the one that struck Neville's fancy in the earlier books. He did ask her to the Yule Ball first (Ginny was second choice). If he was hoping to dance like a god for anyone, I'm fairly certain it would have been for Hermione.

Why did you make Ginny react to Umbridge in the same way Harry did?

Ginny is just as hot tempered as Harry, if not more. Ginny would not have been able to just sit there while someone called Harry a liar,

especially when she had first hand account of what Voldemort was capable of. Based on Ginny's personality and her experience, I feel I have created an accurate portrayal of what she would do.

Isn't it hypocritical of Ginny to be so jealous of Cho when she's been with Michael?

YES, but it would be unrealistic if she reacted any other way. Jealousy is a very real part of life and I'm willing to bet that most people in her situation would have felt the exact same emotion.

Does a Ginny/Cho friendship really sound realistic to you?

I imagine that Michael and Cho were friends, and maybe even part of the same social group. After all, they are dating at the end of OotP, and we tend to date people we are around more often. Since Ginny would be spending a lot time with Michael (ergo spending a lot of time in Ravenclaw), interaction with Cho would happen sooner or later (even if Michael and Cho weren't friends). There is at least one place (maybe two) in canon that Ginny seeks Cho tell her about DA related things (much to Harry's dismay).

Hasn't anyone else seen this scenario before though? The girl-with-a-crush is trying to get over her crush so she tries a bit too hard to help out her crush's love life. I've been witness to this with my network of friends.

And if Cho were smart, she would do exactly what I have her doing. For information on Harry, seek out someone close to Harry. Cho isn't going to ask Hermione, seeing that she's already convinced that Hermione is a romantic rival, and she's certainly not going to get advice from Ron, who has already chastised her for liking the wrong Quidditch team. Ginny would be the perfect choice, seeing that she IS in Ravenclaw Tower a lot and is perhaps even an extension of Cho's social circle.

I wouldn't call what Cho and Ginny had a friendship though. It wasn't a tell-all, share-all type of deal, you know?

Why did Michael tell Ginny he loved her?

They were dating for about a half year. I would assume most couples would be saying 'I love you' before this. Michael could very well be in love with the idea of loving her. I like to think he said it because he felt her slipping away from and thought it might help or save the relationship. I also think Ginny's reaction is realistic. I think the majority of girls would melt at those words, especially if it was her first time hearing it.

What DO those initials stand for in the Hall of Prophecies?

F.E.C. to H.M.B. Jesus of Nazareth and V.G. to H.L.R. Adolph Hitler and Gellert Grindelwald... I'm sorry to say that they are completely random.

Do you really think Ginny would have known that Harry fancied her?

C'mon. The girl had a crush on the kid for how many years? How many of you over-analyze everything your crush does or says to you? It's not as if Harry was being very discreet about it either. If she didn't know, surely she would have suspected something odd.

Why does Ginny know so much? What evidence is there from the books?

In my opinion, A LOT!

In COS, Ginny was able to sneak up and catch Percy kissing Penelope. That's not a huge piece of evidence, but we know that she is at least sneaky.

In GOF, it is established that Hermione and Ginny have already begun sharing things with each other that they don't share with the boys (think Victor Krum) so it's not a long stretch to think that Hermione might fill her in on some of the details throughout the series.

In OotP, it is established that Ginny is an eaves-dropper (i.e. listening in on the Order meetings with the Ears). Don't forget that the twins tell us that Hermione will most likely keep Ginny informed.

In all the books, when something of great importance is being discussed, Ginny reacts usually one of two ways. One, she is quiet

and says very little to nothing at all. Silence infers knowledge that she can't (or wishes not to) reveal. Two, she is understanding. Understanding also infers some kind of knowledge of what is happening.

Especially in HBP. When Harry breaks up with Ginny, she doesn't whine. She doesn't beg. She *understands*, without even asking him deeper questions.

I doubt JK Rowling intended for Ginny to have as much knowledge as I have given her, but I hope with her subtle clues and the background I have provided, you might think that my ideas are logical, plausible, and reasonable.

Wait... I thought Ginny UNDERSTOOD Harry's decision to break up with her. Why does she begin to doubt him in Chapter 14?

Harry broke up with Ginny to protect her, but that notion was completely destroyed. Ginny isn't safe. Her best friend, her brother, and the love of her life are on a mission that might kill them, her family is in constant danger, and she and her friends are always at risk at Hogwarts. I think that's more than enough to doubt a decision like that.

Why did you make Draco good?

If you read Deathly Hallows, I am only following the development of his character. In Malfoy Manor, it's obvious who Hermione is (maybe not Harry), but Draco still refuses to name her. When we get to that scene in the Room of Requirement, it may seem that Draco is working AGAINST Harry, but his actions remind me more of Snape. He refuses to hurt anyone (that was all Crabbe). I'm convinced that Draco was tired of it all. However, I don't think it makes him "good" for assisting the Rebellion, I think it makes him more Slytherin. By helping in the smallest way that he is, he ensures that he (and maybe his family) might be safe if Voldemort loses.

Besides, something major had to happen to keep the Malfoys out of Azkaban (as JK explains) other than just, "We didn't fight in the final battle, so could you ignore all the other bad stuff we've done?"

Why were Snape's memories swirling around all willy-nilly in the Pensieve?

It could have been for several reasons. The same reason we write diaries and go back to read them. The same reason we take pictures and go back to view them. I personally would say that he was sifting through the memories and trying to decide which ones to give to Harry when the time came.

I don't it's logical to think that Snape would have sat Harry down for a little one-on-one time to reveal everything to him. I think it's more in character for Snape to hand Harry a bottle of memories and let him work it out on his own.

Isn't it just a little too obvious that you're trying to make Snape a good guy? He's fooled Voldemort for all those years, and yet Ginny can tell (or thinks) that he's protecting them?

I think it would have been clear for anyone who would sit down and actually think about Snape's actions that something wasn't adding up. Why didn't he reveal Grimmauld Place? Why didn't he tell Voldemort that Ginny and Harry were dating? Why were his punishments (i.e. the forest and taking Hogsmeade away from Ginny) so drastically mild compared to the Carrow's punishment (torture, torture, and more torture)? Most people wouldn't even think twice because Snape was a murderer and that sealed his every action as evil and conniving.

(And yes, you've caught me, I wanted Ginny to be the one doubting, although I think JK Rowling provided enough clues about Ginny's character, and I've provided enough background in this story to make it very reasonable that Ginny would be exploring the option that Snape was protecting them.)

Snape did keep his secrets from Voldemort, but remember that Voldemort has that nasty habit of overlooking everything. (Think Regulus, think house-elves, think every confrontation that Harry ever had with Voldemort). And remember, it wasn't Snape's duty to protect the students until he became headmaster, and Voldemort was not around to see what was going on (I'm sure if he was, he'd be wondering why Snape was going easy on the children). Mix that with the fact that Voldemort was distracted and obsessed with finding the

Elder Wand, there was no time to even consider that Snape was a good guy.

I hope that I've at least provided you with something to think about, even if you don't jump on the bandwagon with me. I know that this is purely opinion, but just know that I have good reason for everything I do in this story.

I've read in another story where Ginny knows Harry is alive when she hears Hagrid call for his body. Why didn't you do that?

I like the idea A LOT, the notion that Ginny knew he was alive and fought for passion instead of revenge. I even considered doing it, but it just doesn't work in my mind. If you recall, there was a great uproar happening at that time, (pg733 "...*Then, over the screams and the roars and the thunderous stamps of the battling giants, Hagrid's yell came loudest of all.*"). The only reason WE hear Hagrid here is because HARRY hears Hagrid. I doubt Ginny would have been able to hear it. I also would have loved for her to sense Harry as he rushed by (like she did in earlier chapters and canon), but he never passed her. Then you have Ginny fighting Bellatrix, of all people. I might be overstepping my boundaries a bit here, but that's like a death wish. It looks to me more like vengeance.

And lastly, I wouldn't have been able to include that kick-ass line: *"Whatever tears fell now would not be ones of grief, they would be ones of twisted revenge. I was going to kill Bellatrix, that much was certain, and the only thing that mattered now was which spell I would decide to use on her."*

Why did you reunite Harry and Ginny so soon after the Final Battle?

They waited for each other. They longed for each other. They spent ten months apart from each other with only the memory of the other to keep them going. The only logical outcome would be a swift reunion the moment a chance was given to them. They would need each other's support in the months to come. I'm surprised they didn't reunite sooner, to be honest.

Shouldn't Ginny be a lot more angry with Harry after he pretended he was dead?

Ginny is a hot-headed individual and if it had been any other person, I think she would have been pretty pissed. But it was *Harry*, her weakness that she's always had. He has the ability to make her do things that no one ever has. (Even Ron said she it's odd for her to be shy around Harry.) Ginny usually doesn't like to be protected (she's determined to accompany the Trio to the Ministry... she wouldn't accept help when she broke her ankle in the Battle at the Ministry... she gets pretty mad at Ron for being a protective older brother several times... look how pissed she was when Dean was just *helping her through a portrait hole...*) but when it came to Harry, she accepts his judgment. Harry steps in front of her to protect her at the Ministry and she doesn't push him away, Harry breaks up with her to protect her and she understands, with one look, Ginny accepts (half-heartedly) that she must stay in the Room of Requirement during the Final Battle. Who else could do something like that to her? No one *but* Harry.

Not to mention that she had just lost her brother Fred, her mentors Tonks and Lupin, and possibly a good friend in Colin. What emotion could possibly override the amount of grief she must have been experiencing? Finding out Harry was alive, and seeing his victory, and *knowing* he was *finally* free to live without fear of Voldemort had to be the only thing that provided any kind of comfort that day.

You can see why it's just not logical (at least to me) that she would have been angry at him for pretending he was dead.

Don't you think you rushed the Ron/Hermione wedding?

Yes, I do. I found it refreshing that after seven long years that they were finally trying to catch up. They've been in love for years! They've waited so long to finally admit that out loud. I like the contrast that since they are finally together, they couldn't wait any longer. Plus, they were both out of school, both of age, and both finally in the same place emotionally and romantically. And it's not uncommon for Wizarding folks to get married right out of school.

Wait, a minute! Witches can get pimples! What about Marietta Edgecombe and Eloise Midgen?

I imagine that under normal circumstances, most wizarding folk wouldn't keep pimples for very long, much like they don't keep broken bones for very long. Marietta was cursed with a spell that was suppose to keep the pimples intact. And I predict that Eloise's pimple problem was not a normal one.

Isn't Newt Scamander retired?

So was Moody. So was Slughorn. Why can't the best magizoologist take a few years off of retirement?

The Deathly Hallows timeline seems a little off... are you sure you have it right?

Not all the dates are handed to us on a silver platter, although I'd love it if they were. It would make my job a whole lot easier.

Is not clear when Ron left, but there are certain clues that have convinced me of mid-October. That part of the timeline comes from the night Ron runs. They are listening to Ted talking and he says he's been on the run for 6-7 weeks. When the Trio invaded the Ministry, it was the very beginning of September and that's also about the time the ministry was rounding up the Muggleborns instead of asking them to come for questioning. Assuming Ted ran right away (which I believe he did and what would make sense), 6 weeks would bring us right into mid-October.

Why did you write chapter 19 in letter form?

The best stories/books/novels are moved along with conflict and resolve of that conflict. I simply didn't have the heart to make Ginny's seventh year a difficult one. Plus, I imagine a lot of letters would be sent and I think it would be interesting to be able to view those letters.

Was Hermione or someone hexing the Snitch so Ginny would catch it?

No, no, noone hexed the Snitch. Ginny was an amazing player that year. It would have been obvious that Ginny would have won simply by watching how talented she had become on the broom. I suspect

that if Harry's plan had backfired, he would have gotten the ring back and thought of something else.

WHY, OH, WHY did you put Albus in Slytherin?

After nineteen years, Slytherin isn't all that bad. It might still have that dark reputation, but it would have been seen a great improvement. If it's always the rest of Hogwarts versus Slytherin, that's what helps breed darkness. If a prejudice as small as which particular Hogwarts house cannot be overcome 20 years later, then how can a prejudice as big as magical blood be expected to do the same?

I've mentioned that Harry has some prominent Slytherin traits (even Dumbledore agreed) and Albus is most like Harry. I'm not talking about affinity with dark magic. I'm talking about cunningness, resourcefulness, determination, and ambition, all of which Harry has (some more than others).

I also feel that it would have cheapened that special moment between Harry and Albus in the epilogue if I have just thrown him into Gryffinor. Whereas I don't foresee Albus CHOOSING Slytherin, I can see him accepting the fate of the Sorting Hat. One of the main points of the series is that it is OUR CHOICES that make us who we are. It doesn't matter what house you'd be Sorted into as long as you are a righteous and respectable person.

Albus's initials are A.S.P. An asp is a type of snake. Sure, it could have been a coincidence, but JK Rowling chooses the names of her characters carefully. Many, many names give clues to the character's personalities or appearances. Sirius is the dog star, Remus is raised by a wolf in Roman mythology, and so on and so forth.

You have to also look at this from a literary perspective. Why was that epilogue focused on Albus? Why not James, the firstborn? Why not Lily, the lastborn? The same effect could have been achieved with all of the children, maybe even better with Harry's last child heading off to Hogwarts, but JK Rowling chose Albus to showcase. Not to mention, she said herself that Albus's story is most interesting. What would be so interesting about a Potter child entering Gryffindor? We've seen that story before, there's nothing different about it.

Don't you think Ginny would have been far more fiery and hot-headed than you have her being?

I don't Ginny is as fiery as fans and fanfic'ers make her out to be, but I'm willing to admit that Ginny might have been a little more fiery than I described. However, I feel I did a pretty good job when it came to Michael and Dean, her reactions with Umbridge, and her fights with Vaiseya and Harper, etc. Keep in mind that I fit almost 4 decades of her life into about 200,000 words. There would have obviously been far more times for her fieriness to take place.

Don't you think you made Ginny too much like Harry?

They would have had to be a lot like each other. For characters like Ginny and Harry, opposites *DO NOT* attract. Harry *tried* to be with Cho, someone who needed to always talk about her emotions and was far too weepy. Imagine that break-up scene in DH with Cho instead of Ginny (She would have tried to *kill* herself, don't you think?) They both need someone who is their equal, who can read each other's moods, who has shared the same kind of experiences, and understands without needing an explanation. They were a lot alike not because I made them that way, but because it just wouldn't have worked for them any other way.

You make it seem like Ginny doesn't have a life of her own and she does nothing but pine for Harry and the Trio.

The biggest point of this story was to retell all the events that led up to winning Harry's heart (and that included many things. Kissing Colin gave her a new sense of confidence. Dating Michael helped her get over her intense shyness, etc etc) and what she had to endure to keep it all together when he was gone. Of course, there were all kinds of fun things that didn't really tell that, but I feel for the most part, that's what I was trying to accomplish.

I feel that an eleven-year-old Ginny would have wanted nothing more than to join the Trio. (Her brother was best friends with her crush.) She would have loved to play the tagalong. These were things she most likely wrote to Tom Riddle. After the Chamber of Secrets, Ginny would have needed them more than ever, but she once again found

out she was left behind. A vulnerable girl like her would have pined for them.

And what about the scenes that mimicked the Trio's scenes?

I'll admit that I felt readers needed that familiarity to connect with the story. I honestly feel I had more original scenes than mimic scenes (sarimanok, kissing Colin, Quidditch races, hearing Krum and Karoff, watching Krum asking Hermione out, etc etc).

Don't forget that once again, there would have been far more story since this stretches through almost 4 decades. I bet there could be whole books devoted entirely to her friendship with Neville, or her relationship with her brothers, or her odd agreement with Draco.

I apologize if you feel I have cheapened Ginny's story. That was not my intention at all.

Why didn't you continue this story?

When I finished writing my take on DH, I finally understood why JKR decided to leave the ended of Deathly Hallows so ambiguous. The last couple chapters, especially chapter 34 "The Forest Again," were phenomenal. With a climax like that, everything after just seems inconsequential.

Another reason is that a good fanfiction/story/novel/any entertainment requires some kind of conflict to move the plot along and I don't have the heart to make such conflict when, as JK puts it, "All was well."

Another reason is that I don't feel the desire to continue the story. The prevailing reason I started this Ginny-POV fanfiction is because I really felt that her story was lacking in this world of Fanfiction. With the post-DH nineteen year gap, I've read some great fanfictions that I'm satisfied with.

Haven't you made Ginny some sort of goddess out of Ginny?

I think this is also more commonly known in the fanfiction world as a "MarySue."

This comment bothered me the most out of all of them because that was not my intention at all, and I apologize to the readers that feel that I made Ginny perfect. But then I got to thinking about it. I simply followed the formula (except for the vast amount of knowledge) of JK Rowling's Ginny.

Quidditch skills? That was JK Rowling. **Boys liking Ginny?** JK Rowling again. **Magical power?** JK Rowling. I started with JK Rowling vision and I built a background to it. If the twins really believe that Ginny is a small yet powerful witch, then they obviously witnessed her doing some powerful magic. If Ginny really has a lot of boys noticing her like the Slytherins said she did, then there would need to be evidence for that. If Ginny really joins the Holyhead Harpies like JK Rowling said she did, then she had to be great at Quidditch.

So please, in all honesty, I ask you to point out the places where I made Ginny this "Mary-Sue" kind of character.

A lot of the information after chapter 17 is inaccurate. What's up with that?

This story was written before December 1, 2007. Any information available to me before that date was used in this story. It would be a lifelong quest to keep updating my story to fit in with added information. I will not continue to alter my story as new revelations are revealed.

Although I had to guess on a lot of things, I think I did a pretty good job at it, and the information I got wrong has been minor details.

I was going to say that these chapters had become AU (alternate universe) but I don't like that. I subscribe to SU (Sensible Universe-see FAQ section for further information on SU).

What is the Sensible Universe?

(taken from Cassandra'sCross)

THE SENSIBLE UNIVERSE (SU)

January 1, 2008: The Sensible or Sober Universe (SU) was conceived by a fanfic author on the FFN Reviews Lounge. The SU philosophy expresses the view of many of us who have tried to keep our stories "canon," in line with J.'s vision for Harry Potter, but who, in light of recent revelations, can no longer do so. The "Sober" Universe was in reference to a tongue-in-cheek opinion expressed by another author (not me) that Ms. Rowling must have been high when she made some of her post-series decisions. Although I don't believe that's true, I do question both the sense and sensitivity of some of her decisions, which is why I prefer the phrase "Sensible Universe."

Without going into the reasons for my objections (which I've already chronicled in sufficient detail in other, more appropriate forums) suffice it to say that all my fics, now and forevermore, will be SU. They will adhere as closely as possible to canon, but only insofar as canon facts make sense to me.

I am aware that, by its very nature, fanfiction is not "canon," but for those of us who showed enough respect for Ms. Rowling to make every effort to keep our fics aligned with her vision, this decision has not been an easy one. Had she included any or all of this information at the end of Deathly Hallows, that would have been wonderful. Instead she gave us a very sparse Epilogue and then proceeded to dribble out information in a manner that many fans, myself included, have found a little upsetting. I loved the universe that Jo created in the first seven books, but beyond "The Flaw in the Plan," I've come to prefer the kinder, gentler world of my own imagination and that of other talented fanfic writers.

(now, back to me)

In addition to this, I promise to keep any and all things I write lined up with book-canon, but if I do not promise the same with post-book revelations, especially if I already have something written that contradicts that.

Why were there so MANY chapter updates when you were writing this story?

I wanted to make this as perfect as possible. To do that, frequent changes had to be made. I can't allow a chapter to remain as it is if

there's a misspelled word or a plot hole. I know it was annoying for the readers already signed up, but it will benefit anyone else who comes to read this story.

Why has this story changed since the last time I read it?

You may have noticed that certain paragraphs have been cut or additional information and scenes have been added since the last time you read. It is not your imagination. I went through this story many times in hopes to create a novel that makes sense on all levels. Some things were unnecessary. Some things needed to be fleshed out. It's all in the pursuit of perfection. I want to be able to present a quality product and my standards too high to allow a plot hole or misspelled word.

What are your plans for your life?

I am going to graduate in May 2008 from Bloomsburg University. Currently, I am the Editor of the school magazine. When I graduate, I hope to write for a magazine, but wouldn't pass up the opportunity to write for a newspaper. A big dream of mine is have a book published someday.

If there are any more questions that you'd like to see on this page, don't hesitate to ask them.

WRITTEN BEFORE DECEMBER 1, 2007

LAST UPDATED August 16, 2008

To all my wonderful readers, I thought I'd take the time to let you know that I have recently updated ALL the chapters of "In the Words of Ginevra Molly Potter." In addition to fixing typos and plot holes, I have added dialogue, altered particular scenes, and updated the FAQ section.

One thing that has NOT been updated is any information that JK Rowling has revealed after December 1, 2007. It will become an endless quest to continue to alter this story to fit the post-DH revelations and I refuse to keep rewriting my story in order to keep in canon.

Have fun looking for the changes!